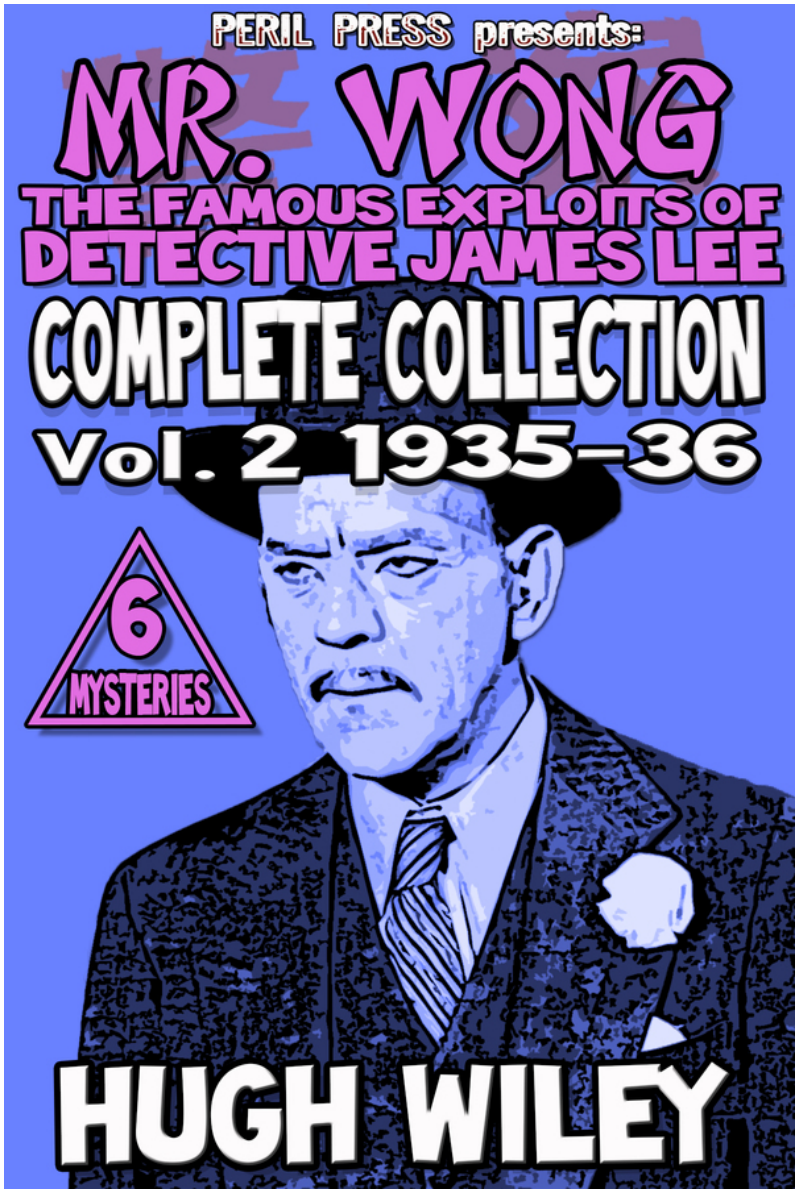
PERIL PRESS presents:
MR. WONG
THE FAMOUS EXPLOITS OF DETECTIVE JAMES LEE
COMPLETE COLLECTION
Vol. 2 1935-36
6 MYSTERIES
HUGH WILEY

PERIL PRESS presents:

Collier’s, June 29 1935
TOO MUCH ICE
by Hugh Wiley

Collier's, July 20 1935
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SEVEN OF SPADES
by Hugh Wiley

***

Collier's, June 29 1935

TOO MUCH ICE

by Hugh Wiley

Illustrated by Irving Nurick

Another Adventure of James Lee, who knew that diamonds don't have wings

James Lee Wong runs down the loot.

"Dis man been shot!" The redcap asked the driver, "Who shot de man?" "Get a cop," the taxi driver said.

IN THE evening between 7:30 and 7:40 nice old Karl Hoffman checked out of the Palace Hotel.

On the curb, at a nod from the boy who carried Mr. Hoffman's bags, old Hughie, the doorman, barked a command at the driver of the cab that stood at the head of the line. "Roll one!"

"I'm catching the Overland," Mr. Hoffman said to Hughie.

He got into the taxicab. The car swung around to the left and started for Market Street. The traffic was heavy and the lights held Mr. Hoffman's cab twice before the driver swung into the wide circle right and left to stop where the redcaps waited on the

sidewalk with the luggage trucks for the Overland passengers. Three seconds after he stopped, the driver reached up with his right hand and pulled down the meter flag. He got out and pulled the fare slip out of the meter. He held the fare slip in his left hand and reached inside with his right to open the door of the cab. A redcap had beaten him to it.

“Overland man?” the redcap asked.

“That's what Hughie said at the Palace,” the taxi driver answered.

“Yass, suh!” the redcap said, swinging the door wide open. “Can I look at yo' reservations, suh? You finds yo' baggage right on de train.”

Nice old Mr. Hoffman made no reply. He was leaning back in the left-hand corner of the taxi. Two thin rivulets of bright blood flowed down from the corners of Mr. Hoffman's mouth. The left breast of his tightly-buttoned gray coat was punctured with three bullet holes.

“Dis man been shot!” The redcap pulled back out of the door of the taxi and asked the driver, “Who shot de man?”

“Get a cop!” the taxi driver said.

“I gits Mr. Sullivan.”

The redcap got Officer Sullivan.

“Day's a man been shot in a taxicab!”

“Shot. Where is he?”

Seven or eight people had heard the redcap's announcement. Out of this group when the policeman opened the door of the taxicab wherein lay Mr. Hoffman, one calm and self-possessed stranger offered aid. “I am a doctor,” he said.

The stranger shoved his way into the taxicab beside Mr. Hoffman. “I'll have a look,” he said. He hauled a stethoscope out of his

pocket and opened Mr. Hoffman's coat and vest. He held the stethoscope against Mr. Hoffman's chest for a moment and then, stepping out of the cab, “Lift him out and lay him flat on the sidewalk,” he said to the policeman. “His heart's barely beating. He can't last long. Telephone for an ambulance!” he added. “Quick!”

MORE than six months after Karl Hoffman's death, Newell Savage, Pacific Coast agent for the London Insurance Company, faced James Lee across the wide table in the library of James Lee's San Francisco apartment.

“Do you recall the Hoffman murder case, Mr. Lee?” the insurance man asked.

“I read the headlines. He was a paint salesman, wasn't he?”

“Printers' inks. He traveled for the Rainbow Ink Company of Chicago.”

“I remember. Big life insurance?”

“That isn't the point. The ink business was camouflage. Mr. Hoffman's ink game was a mask. The real job was selling diamonds—big diamonds. He was a general agent for the Amsterdam Syndicate.”

“I suppose he carried a lot of diamonds with him?”

“You're right. That's why I'm here. He left Chicago on his last trip with seventy diamonds in his case, exceptional stones—ten or fifteen carats apiece. A million dollars' worth of diamonds. He sold three stones in Los Angeles; four more here in San Francisco. He must have had sixty-three diamonds in his pocket when he was killed. The London Insurance Company is stuck for nearly eight hundred thousand dollars. The company has had a dozen men at work on the case.”

“Any luck?”

“No luck; that's why I'm here.”

“You check up on the diamond thieves?”

“Yes.”

“Where was Edith Arnold?”

“She was in Berlin.”

“Fat Sam Kent?”

“Sunning himself in Bermuda.”

“You get a line on Roy Miner?”

“He was in Hollywood. You can find him easily any moment you want him. He's in San Quentin now.”

“I remember. Murdered the woman he was living with.”

Newell Savage nodded. “He sure done her wrong—Sugar Eva Brady.”

“She was a fat slob. Why did Miner kill her?”

“Jealousy, I suppose. Found another lover in the house.”

“Who was he?”

“Some crook by the name of Barber Joe Crane.”

“Any other big shots on the west coast when it happened?”

“Non-e that we know about. We're beginning to think that some new talent pulled the job. I wish you'd look over the case for us.”

James Lee nodded. “I will,” he promised. Then: “What kind of an alibi did Roy Miner have? Where was he the night Hoffman was murdered?”

“His alibi is perfect. He had dinner at the Ambassador in Los

Angeles with Sugar Eva that night. Half a dozen witnesses established that."

"How do you know that Fat Sam Kent was in Bermuda?"

"Fifty witnesses. Checked on him day and night for a month before and after the murder."

"Any of the stones show up?"

"So far, none of them."

"Can you identify them?"

"The weight records are exact. They're worth from ten to thirty thousand dollars apiece. The diamond people aren't careless with those things."

"It won't be easy to sell them in America." James Lee lighted a cigarette. "Will you have a glass of sherry?"

"Thanks."

To his visitor, lifting his own glass, "Here's luck," James Lee said. "I wish you'd let me have a transcript of the testimony taken at the coroner's inquest on poor Hoffman."

"I'll get it for you," Newell Savage promised. "I'm awfully glad you're going to work on the case."

"Thank you." James Lee bowed.

HUGHIE, doorman at the Palace Hotel: "Yes, Misther Lee, I knew Misther Hoffman for sixteen years. He was a kind gentleman."

James Lee: "Who was the next man out in a taxi after Mr. Hoffman left?"

Hughie: "The next man that left here in a taxicab was two ladies.

One of them was Mrs. Webster, that lives on Jackson Street. . . .”

FRANK DAWSON, taxi driver of the cab in which Karl Hoffman was killed: “Hughie said, 'Roll one!' I was first in line. Mr. Hoffman got in and I took him to the Ferry Building to catch the Overland. Somebody shot him three times.”

James Lee: “Was there much traffic on Market Street?”

Frank Dawson: “Market Street was thick with traffic.”

James Lee: “Mr. Hoffman was killed with three bullets that entered his left lung. Did you hear any shots?”

Frank Dawson: “With everything backfiring for eight or ten blocks there was times when it sounded like the hot spot in Chateau-Thierry. I was over there with the infantry, Mr. Lee. They might have used a silencer, whoever it was.”

James Lee: “Did you follow the outer tracks or were you clear of the rails on the way down?”

Frank Dawson: “Not with tires costin' what they do. I stay in the clear of the steel.”

James Lee: “But there was room for cars to pass you on the right?”

Frank Dawson: “Them little jitneys dive in wherever they is a place eight feet clear.”

MIKE SULLIVAN, officer on duty at the Ferry Building: “The nigrah boy come over white as a sheet the way he acted and yelled out that a man had been shot in a taxicab. I folleyed him to the taxi. There was poor Misther Hoffman shot three times through the lungs and from what the doctor said not a chance in the world for him to live.”

James Lee: “Who was the doctor?”

Officer Sullivan: “Some good Samaritan that didn't like the pooblicity of a man dyin' right in his face. I've seen him many times. He had a musstash. I don't know his name.”

James Lee: “How old was the doctor?”

Officer Sullivan: “He was a middle-aged lad somewhere between forty and sixty. He had a musstash.”

James Lee: “Thank you, Sergeant.”

GRIFFIN MILBURN, redcap at the Perry Building: “Yass, suh, Mistah Lee. I remembers de gruesome details mighty well.”

James Lee: “What did the doctor look like?”

Redcap: “Look like a middlin' ablebodied doctor. Sho quick on de trigger.

Had poor Mr. Hoifman's coat an' vest unbuttoned an' wipin' de blood off his face befo' anybody figgered on ringin' for de ambulance.”

James Lee: “I want to find that doctor. Tell me something about him that will help me. What was the difference between him and a thousand other doctors?”

Redcap: “Lemme see . . . dogged if I knows. . . . Wait a minnit! He never snielled like no doctor.”

James Lee: “What do doctors smell like?”

Redcap: “You know? whut dey smells like, Mistah Lee—sort of a cross between deodorizin' a henhouse an' hospitals. You know whut de medicines smell like whut dey uses around hospitals. All de doctors smells like dat.”

James Lee: “What did the doctor who examined Mr. Hoffman smell like?”

Redcap: “He never smelled like no doctor—smelled more like a doghouse. . . . I don't mean a doghouse—smelled somethin' like a dog.”

James Lee: “Do you mean he smelled like a wet dog—like a dog smells after he comes in out of the rain all wet and dirty?”

Redcap: “Naw, suh, dat ain't whut I means at all. Dis man smelled like a dog smells whut is travelin' on de Overland. High-toned. You knows de aroma of dem nigh-toned dogs, Mistah Lee.”

James Lee: “You wait right here—I'll be back in five minutes.”

James Lee, returning from a drug store one block from the Ferry Building, facing Griffin Milburn, the redcap, hauled a bottle of Rover's Mange Remedy out of his pocket. “Shut your eyes,” he said to the redcap. “Is this what that doctor smelled like?” Mr. Lee removed the cork from the bottle of Rover's Mange Remedy and waved it within six inches of the redcap's nose.

Griffin Milburn agitated his nostrils and then, quickly, “Yass, suh, Mistah Lee! Dat's exactly de medicine dat de doctor smelled like! Just like whut a fust-class dog smells like whut travels on de Overland wid rich folks—travels in de baggage car, dat is. . . .”

In a room adjoining the offices of the captain of the guard in San Quentin, facing Roy Miner, “I want to talk to you about the Hoffman murder,” James Lee said.

“Go ahead and talk,” Roy Miner sneered. “I got lots of time. Twenty years. I pulled a murder of my own.”

“Well, let's talk about your murder,” James Lee suggested. “Off the record, why did yovi kill Sugar Eva?”

Roy Miner scowled. “On the record I killed her because I caught her with Barber Joe Crane.”

JAMES LEE smiled thinly. “I think you're a liar. Sugar Eva was no prize. Why did you kill her?”

“I killed her because I caught her with that damned gi-easy Crane.”

“You pulled a messy job and now you're trying to pull a messy story. Come clean.”

“I 'm giving it to you straight. She was slobbering around over that man the same way she slobbered around over that rat-faced poodle that she always lugged ai'ound with her.”

Evenly, “You slipped on the poodle detail. You overlooked a bet!” James Lee said. “He barked too much.”

“I know it,” Roy Miner nodded. “If I'd bumped off the dog I'd have been in the clear. The damned little mangy cur barking until the landlady opened the room and . . . found Sugar Eva.”

James Lee yawned. “Well, we all make mistakes. I've made half a dozen of them on this Hoffman murder. What I want you to do is to help me line up a few ideas. You know all the big shots in the diamond racket. Which one of them killed Hoffman?”

“Probably Edith Arnold.”

“Don't kid me. She was in Berlin.”

“Then it was Fat Sam Kent. He has always been a killer.”

“Don't kid me a lot more. Fat Sam was in Bermuda. You're in here for twenty years on the Sugar Eva deal. Help me out on this Hoffman thing and I'll do what I can for you with the parole board.”

Roy Miner gritted his teeth. Under his breath so t h a t the two prison guards in the captain's office could not hear him, “To hell with you,” Roy Miner snarled, “you crazy fool. I'll help you into hell the first chance I get.”

James Lee shook his head slowly. “Maybe not,” he said, gently. “I just thought of something. I'll have to ask Barber Joe Crane about it.”

IN LOS ANGELES, following a check of Roy Miner's alibi in the Hoffman murder, James Lee asked the police department for the exhibits in the Sugar Eva Brady killing. He devoted three minutes to a brief inspection of the photographs of the bullets that the surgeons had removed from Sugar Eva's fat body. Then to the police lieutenant in charge of these exhibits: "Please ask one of your men to get me a reservation on the first eastbound plane to Chicago. Lend me your car, will you? How much time have I got?"

In a moment, after a quick look at the airplane schedules: "You've got forty-five minutes. I'll phone out to the airport and have them hold the plane."

"Thanks, Lieutenant. Do that, please. Goodby, old man. Many thanks for all the favors." Hesitating then for five seconds: "I wish you'd wire the chief of police in Chicago over my signature to bring in Barber Joe Crane. Ask the chief to hold him till I get there."

IN CHICAGO, facing Barber Joe Crane in the chief's office, "Who shot Karl Hoffman?" James Lee asked.

"I don't know what you mean."

"I'll tell you what I mean. Roy Miner killed Sugar Eva Brady. He says he found you with her. That's his reason for killing her. Sort of a joke, isn't it?"

"I don't get you."

"You'll get me in a minute. Roy Miner is no love killer. He and Sugar Eva rigged the Hoffman murder. What I want to know is who killed Hoffman. Did Eva shoot him or did you?"

Barber Joe sneered. "You're crazy."

"What were you doing in San Francisco the night Hoffman was shot?"

“I wasn't in San Francisco.”

“You were in San Francisco. You and Sugar Eva trailed the old man down Market Street in his taxicab. One of you shot him. Listen to me. The bullets that killed Sugar Eva and the bullets that killed Karl Hoffman were fired from the same gun.”

Barber Joe Crane's face went white. “I don't know nothing about that. I never done it.”

James Lee nodded. “Very well,” he said pleasantly. “You've got a poor memory. I'm not going to bother with you. I'm out for the diamonds. What did you do with them? Sugar Eva turned them over to you, didn't she? That's the reason Roy Miner shot her. That's the only reason he'd shoot her. Where are the diamonds? How many of them have you sold? The chief's men tell me you've been too prosperous lately.”

Continuing: “You might as well come clean. They're going to hang you for the Hoffman murder. Tell me where you've got the diamonds. Maybe I can break the sentence down to life for you.”

Barber Joe Crane stared straight ahead for a moment. Then he gulped his lungs full of air. “I've got the diamonds in my box at the bank,” he said quietly. “Do what you can for me, will you? I sold three of them. . . . Don't let 'em hang me, Mr. Lee! I didn't shoot Hoffman. Sugar Eva shot him,”

James Lee nodded. “That's what I thought,” he said quietly.

TO NEWELL SAVAGE over long distance, “You can cable the London office that we have recovered all but three of the diamonds,” James Lee reported. “Sugar Eva Brady shot Hoffman. Roy Miner was the phony doctor who looked him over at the Perry Building.”

“But they were in Los Angeles!”

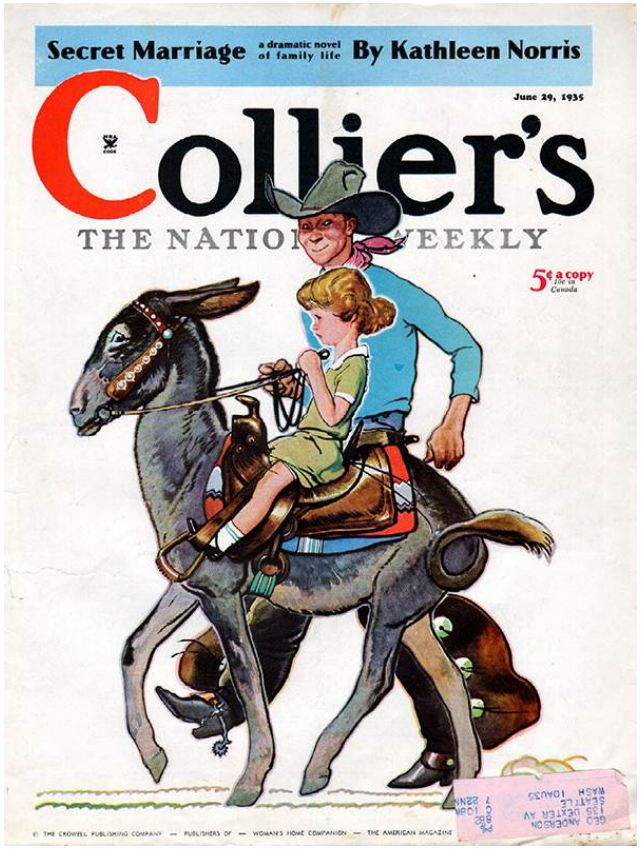
“They were there before and after the old man was killed,” James Lee explained. “Two hours up to San Francisco and two hours

back on an airliner."

"Well, I'll be darned! . . . You've done the slickest piece of work I ever heard of! How did you crack the case?"

"I'll tell you all about it Thursday. I'm flying back tonight."

Late Thursday afternoon, "The redcap at the Ferry Building gave me the lead on the case," James Lee explained to Newell Savage. "When he described the doctor who examined Hoffman he said that the doctor smelled like a dog. I played a hunch. I remembered the barking dog in Sugar Eva's murder. The doctor was Roy Miner. The smell on him was the poodle's mange remedy. That's all there was to it. The minute I compared the photographs of the bullets that killed Sugar Eva and Karl Hoffman the case was cinched. . . . Maybe you'd better hand that redcap the reward check. His nose saved your company a lot of money."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Collier's, July 20 1935

Mr. Wong:

JAYBIRD'S CHANCE

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

Illustrated by Irving Nurick

The suavest of all detectives, James Lee, again. This time, trailing a thief, he adroitly proves that a man can lose at poker—and yet win.

James Lee goes fishing and catches a gold brick

"Has he told you yet where he hid that second brick?" the sheriff asked

"Has he told you where he hid that second brick?" the sheriff asked

"I WOULDN'T bother you with this case, Mr. Lee," Melvin Armstrong explained, "except for the fact that the man who stole

the gold is a Chinese—a countryman of yours. The sheriff's men can't make him talk. We've got the goods on him, all right, but he won't open up."

"What's the man's name?"

"His name is Wong Low."

James Lee nodded. "Probably a distant cousin of mine."

"I thought your name was Lee."

"My family name is Wong. Any Wong is my cousin."

Melvin Armstrong, president of the Gold Rock Mining Corporation, took time out to smile. "Forty million Chinese can't be Weng. Sorry. The point is this man Wong Low, who has been cook at the Payboy for the last six years, got away with two of our gold shipments. They don't amount to much but I want to find the gold."

"How do you know Wong Low is the thief?"

"His fingerprints were on the knob of the safe in the mine office, for one thing. The Bank of Canton issued a draft to his order for ten thousand in gold five days after the first brick was stolen. We discovered that yesterday and arrested him."

"Where are you holding him?"

"The sheriff has him in jail at Colburn."

"How far is the Payboy Mine from Colburn?"

"You turn off the main highway fifteen miles toward Paradise from Colburn—then it's three miles to Mad Creek and another three miles to where the road branches to the right. That's twenty-one miles. The branch road is about eight miles long. It runs down Mad Creek Canyon. That makes twenty-nine or thirty miles from Colburn. You can get out of the mine to the north, to Silica, over a stretch of mountain road. Twelve or fourteen miles. It isn't very feasible for a car. I wouldn't try it if I were you.... Will you look the job over for me?"

James Lee nodded. "I'll be very glad to. What were the gold shipments worth?"

“The first brick weighed slightly over eleven thousand dollars. The second one ran a little stronger—close to twelve thousand. I'm mighty glad you're on the job for us. I'll write a letter to Gorman. He's our superintendent at the Payboy.” Melvin Armstrong pressed a button on his desk. “When can you get on the job?”

“I'll start for Colburn tonight,” James Lee said. After a moment, “How do you usually make these gold shipments from the mine?”

“Good old Uncle Sam. Rural delivery carrier.” “Who carried them from the mine to the Silica-Redhill Road?”

“The mail carrier goes up to the mine once a week. We aren't interested in him. The two bricks were stolen from the safe in the mine office. The first one three weeks ago and the second one day before yesterday. Just a moment and I'll dictate a note to Sam Gorman. You'll find Sam a good egg. If you like fishing, there are a lot of hungry trout in Mad Creek. Excuse me a moment.”

To his secretary, “Take a letter to Gorman,” Mr. Armstrong directed.

“Mr. Sam Gorman Superintendent, Payboy Mine

“Dear Mr. Gorman: This will introduce our confidential operative, Mr. James Lee. We feel sure that you will show him every courtesy and give him whatever assistance he requires.

“Melvin Armstrong.”

“Bring that in here right away.”

Turning to James Lee: “I understand that Gorman and some of the bays in the office play a pretty stiff game of poker up there at the mine. The best trout fishing in the world and a table stake game at night—I wish I could go along with you, Mr. Lee.... Or do you play poker?”

James Lee smiled. “I enjoy the game very much,” he said.

The president of the Gold Rock Mining Corporation signed the letter to his superintendent when the secretary brought it in. He handed the letter to James Lee. “Good luck, Mr. Lee.”

James Lee nodded. “I'll report progress when, as and if it develops. Good morning, Mr. Armstrong.”

IN COLBURN, the county seat of Mountain County, after presenting his credentials to Sheriff George Dutton: “Mr. Armstrong tells me that you have an airtight case against Wong Low,” James Lee said.

Sheriff Dutton nodded vehemently. “We've got that old sinner sewed up tighter than the horsehide cover on a baseball. Only thing that worries me is finding out what he done with that other gold brick.”

Curtly, “What's the evidence against him?” Lee asked.

“In the first place nobody never seen no China boy get rich overnight unless he was gambling or stealing something or sold a woman,” Sheriff Dutton began. “Five days after the Payboy's first gold shipment was stole Wong Low blossoms out with a bank draft for ten thousand dollars in gold. In the second place, one of my boys went up there and dusted the knob of the combination on the safe and found that Chinaman's thumb-prints in three places on it. In the third place, he's a mighty slick individual. Every fan-tan game from Dutch Flat to Little York in the early days was busted sooner or later when he hit camp.

“He's been mighty slick and he got away with it. But now we got him. All that worries me is gettin' the gold back for Mr. Armstrong. I reckon that's where you step in. We been working him over with a short piece of rubber hose but he won't talk worth a cent.” Sheriff Dutton's eyes glinted up suddenly, to meet James Lee's calm gaze. “You savvy his lingo?”

“I speak Chinese,” James Lee said. “I would like to talk to Wong Low.”

“Come along and I'll turn you loose with him in his cell. He's battered up some but he can still talk if he has to.”

Facing his countryman when Sheriff Dutton had left them alone in Wong Low's cell in the county jail, “An ape may sit on a throne,” James Lee said in Cantonese, nodding toward the

departing sheriff. “Courage! A stone lion does not fear the rain.”

Old Wong Low nodded his bandaged head. “Aye, an intelligent man recognizes the will of heaven.”

“Time is an arrow. Tell me your story quickly.”

Seated on his cot in the jail cell old Wong Low looked up at James Lee.

“The eyebrows of youth cannot compare with the beard of age,” he suggested. “The horseman does not know the footman's trials. I have stolen nothing.”

“You are an ant on a hot rock. Minnows can laugh at a stranded whale.”

“True enough,” Wong Low agreed. “Let me remind you, though, that the weight of a man's tongue can crush a giant.”

“A hunting dog does not feel his fleas. On the jail gates in the Central Glory are four words: 'You repent too late.'“

“I HAVE nothing to repent. The tree for shade, the man for reputation. I have stolen nothing.”

“Where did you get the money to pay for the ten-thousand-dollar draft that the Bank of Canton issued to you?” James Lee asked.

“Through the labor of twenty years, I had entrusted my savings to various merchants of the Four Families in San Francisco. I had intended returning to the Central Glory this month—to rest. I have worked hard through long years in the gold hills.”

“Why were the prints of your fingers on the lock of the safe in the mine office?”

“The number two governor of the mine told me to make sure each night that the safe was locked.”

“You mean the engineer, young Mr. Darrell?”

Wong Low nodded. “That is his name,” he said.

“In the river of life no man can swim upstream,” James Lee

suggested. “There is a last step to every journey.”

Wong Low bowed his head. “One moment of life can hold a thousand years of sorrow,” he said. “This jailer who keeps me captive, *ren mien sheo hsin*—the face of a man, the heart of a beast.”

“In this world of darkness heaven disposes,” James Lee suggested. “Have patience. Calamity can be changed into a blessing. *Ch'uh liao si ti.* You will emerge from this place of death. Only the blind see ghosts.”

“Maybe thou hast clear perception,” Wong Low growled. “Who am I to question the will of heaven? I desire to regain the lost harmony of life—sweet after bitter. *Chiu peu-fen*—I have done my duty.”

“Be silent,” James Lee ordered suddenly. “Your jailer returns. Beside the tiger's mouth is a place of danger. Walk the middle path, practice right conduct. All will be well.”

LOOKING DIRECTLY at Sheriff Dutton, who had suddenly appeared at the door of Wong Low's cell: “I have just reminded Wong Low of one of our ancient proverbs—'It is always the smartest monkey that falls from the highest tree.'“

“Has he told you yet where he hid that second brick?” the sheriff asked. “We can get a court order for that gold draft. It's where he hid the second brick that worries me.”

“Making these old men confess is a difficult problem,” James Lee suggested. “Take it easy with him. I wouldn't beat him up any more if I were you. His lamp of life burns low—they die easily at his age.”

“Whatever you say,” Sheriff Dutton agreed. “What's your next move?”

“I'm going up to the Payboy Mine and have a look at the scene of the theft,” James Lee answered. “Will you come up with me?”

“I'll be up in a day or two,” the sheriff answered. “I can't get away right now. Both my deputies is down with the flu.”

At Redhill, fifteen miles from Colburn, James Lee swung his car to the northwest along the Redhill-Silica road. Three miles away from the main highway he crossed Mad Creek on a new concrete bridge and entered the three-mile stretch uphill to the point where the narrow branch road led west-wardly to the Payboy Mine.

Along this road that paralleled Mad Creek he met no traffic. Part of the road was rough, but there were stretches through pine forest where the going was good, and here, careless of his driving, he gave himself over to a pleasurable contemplation of the beauties of the rugged country. Below him, visible through barren areas that broke the wooded slopes, Mad Creek, tumbling to the west, seemed to lie ready to confirm Melvin Armstrong's promise of good trout fishing. The mountain air was heavy with the scent of the pine woods, sweet with the smell of the tarweed that grew in the open glades. Through a sunlit corridor, deep in the pines, he saw three deer walking slowly up the gentle slope that lay back from the steep north bank of Mad Creek. “Good country,” the traveler reflected. “Holiday country. I may prolong my stay.”

James Lee Found a canvas sack. Stenciled on the fabric was "Playboy"

IT WAS nearly four o'clock when he got to the Payboy Mine. The sun lay behind a high mountain to the west and the air was suddenly chill. He drove past a bunkhouse, a cookhouse and a shaded bungalow. In front of the office of the Payboy he stopped his car. He entered the office and faced Sam Gorman. "I am James Lee," he said. "Here is a note for you from Melvin Armstrong. You are Mr. Gorman?"

"I'm what's left of him. I'm mighty glad to see you, Mr. Lee." A hearty handclasp and a warm smile on Sam Gorman's homely countenance left no doubt as to the sincerity of the superintendent's welcome. "Shake hands with Walter Darrell,"

Gorman invited. “That's him settin' at the drafting table. He's the engineer of this Payboy job. That's Tommy Miller settin' there at the desk. He's timekeeper and commissary boss and anything else that's got to be done. All of us feel like damn fools, workin' our heads off to drag a little gold out of the mountains and then having that doggone Wong Low get away with it. By rights I ought to have hung that Chinaman before the sheriff got him.”

James Lee smiled. “You're perfectly sure that he's the thief?”

“They ain't nothin' to it,” Sam Gorman answered. “Nobody had to git that fingerprint feller to prove it to me. I was sure it was him the minute Darrell told me the first brick was missing. We found his fingerprints on the knob of that safe over there and I was twice as sure. When the sheriff found out that the slant-eyed slicker had hid away ten thousand bucks in a bank draft on a Chinese bank I was so all-fired sure Wong Low was the thief that I come dern' near blastin' him into whatever Chinese hell he's headed for. I'd 'a' done it, only I was scared we'd never git no track of the second brick he stole. You have a talk with him down at Colburn?”

Lee nodded. “I talked with him for a while.”

“You get a confession out of him?”

“Not yet. He's a hard man to handle.”

“He's a mighty slick hombre. I suppose you'll want to dig into things right now. I've always wondered how a detective started to work on a case like this.”

James Lee looked steadily at Sam Gorman. “I'm in no hurry to begin work. Tell me, are there any trout in the local stretch of Mad Creek? Do you suppose I could catch enough for supper if I'd go down there now?”

“Boy, you could get enough trout in one hour to feed all four of us. Ill lend you a fishing rig if you want it,” Gorman offered.

“I think I'll fish for an hour. I haven't had any good trout fishing for five years.”

“You catch a mess and bring 'em up here and that Greek

flunky that took Wong Low's place in the kitchen will fry 'em to a fare-ye-well. You like to play poker?"

"I enjoy poker very much."

"We're doggone glad you come—win, lose or draw. Tommy Miller and Walter and me play three-handed nearly every night. Three-handed games ain't no good. Now and then Jim Saunders drifts in. That helps us out."

"Who is Jim Saunders?"

"He's a mighty good poker player. Deputy game warden in this district. Raises hell with the city folks that come up here after trout without no licenses. Dances with the gals down at Colburn doggone near every night and puts in the rest of his time plantin' these streams around here with trout. Jim Saunders is a mighty busy man. He's due through here the next day or two. We can have a five-handed game the night he shows up if he stays over....

"Come along and I'll lend you some old clothes if you ain't got none with you. You've got to wade Mad Creek to do any good with the trout."

AT HALF past six, returning to the Payboy Mine with thirty trout to show for an hour's fishing, James Lee found a light truck standing in front of the mine office. In the body of the truck, insulated against the changing temperatures of the mountain air, sat twelve large milk cans. "Somebody from the trout hatchery planting more fish," James Lee surmised. "Jim Saunders, probably."

Greeting Sam Gorman, "The fish didn't hear that I was coming," the fisherman boasted. "I caught thirty beauties in two short stretches of water."

Sam Gorman chuckled. "Boy, you're mighty close to gittin' overtook with the law. You got a fishing license?"

James Lee smiled. "Guilty," he said. "Game warden driving that fish truck?"

"It's Jim Saunders. I guess maybe I can keep you out of jail

this time. Come on in and meet Jim. We can have a five-handed game tonight."

The five-handed poker game opened up at eight o'clock, no limit and table stakes.

Half the hands played were draw poker with an occasional jack pot, but under the liberty of dealer's choice two of the players, Jim Saunders and young Walter Darrell, persistently elected to deal stud poker. "That's what the doggone war did to these birds," Sam Gorman complained, scowling at Jim Saunders after he had followed an ace in the hole to defeat in the face of three deuces. "Deal the cards."

Dealing the cards, "Play what you get. A hand of draw," Tommy Miller announced.

Under the gun James Lee picked up his hand. "I pass," he said blandly, mildly pleased at the sight of a pat straight running to the nine of diamonds.

"Ten bucks." Jim Saunders dropped two blue chips on the table.

"And fifty before the draw." Walter Darrell tipped over a neat pile of ten blue chips.

"I'll have a look." Sam Gorman met the bet.

"This is an interesting hand," James Lee commented. "All right, I suppose, if I draw to an ace?" He pushed twelve blue chips into the pile on the center of the table.

"That'll be fair enough," Walter Darrell said, "but you won't catch many more. I'm holding four of 'em pat right this minute.... Deal the cards."

Sam Gorman took one card.

"I'll play these," Jim Saunders announced.

James Lee lighted a cigarette. After a moment he tossed his pat straight into the center of the table face down. "Too rich for my blood. I'll bid my sixty bucks goodbye right now and sit on the side lines."

When the smoke cleared away Jim Saunders had captured a six-hundred-dollar pot with a colorful full house made up of queens and jacks.

“This is poker for blood,” James Lee reflected. “I wonder how it is that these middle-weight-salary lads can mix in with such big money. I'll have to play 'em mighty close to keep from losing my shirt, but I've got to stay in the game.”

Playing until midnight, nosing out with a fifty-dollar profit, James Lee was enabled to learn a number of things about his companions. Walter Darrell seemed to be reckless with money. Jim Saunders was careless with small bets, sure of himself with the larger ones. Sam Gorman was mildly drunk by eleven o'clock and lost a thousand dollars between then and midnight. Tommy Miller stayed out of the big pots. Gorman borrowed chips from Jim Saunders and forgot to pay them back.

At midnight Jim Saunders proposed another thirty minutes of play. He laid his watch on the table in front of him. It was a thin and beautiful watch made by Valentine of Geneva.

“That's a mighty nice watch,” James Lee commented.

“Right,” Jim Saunders returned. “She cost me four hundred bucks. Bought her last week in Reno from a New York man that went busted in a gambling joint. He said it cost him a thousand bucks.”

James Lee nodded. “I don't doubt it a bit. That's a fine watch....”

AN HOUR after midnight, after Jim Saunders had been parked away in a spare room in the bungalow and when Tommy Miller and Walter Darrell had retired to their rooms: “Let's have a drink,” Sam Gorman invited James Lee.

After a long moment's careful survey of the glass of whisky that he held in his right hand, “There might be something in what this Chink says about being innocent,” Sam Gorman began. “Did you see the way Darrell played his cards tonight?”

“He made some heavy bets for a salaried man.”

“That's what I mean,” Sam Gorman said. “I didn't tell you this, but it was natural enough for Wong Low's fingerprints to be on the knob of the safe. I heard Darrell tell him one time to see that it was closed every night. Darrell told him to see that the safe door was closed and to twist the combination.”

“What is Darrell's record?”

“He's a Stanford man. He was in Denver for a while—he's been here three years,” Sam Gorman answered. “His record is clear enough but he's notorious for pulling off a wild night two or three times a year in San Francisco. He bought a thousand dollars' worth of champagne at the Palace one night a year ago.”

“I'll have a look at Darrell,” James Lee said. “How about some sleep?”

“Fair enough. I'm going underground at seven o'clock. Would you like to come along?”

Smiling, James Lee shook his head. “Many thanks. I think I'll hit the trout again at sunrise. What time will you be back into daylight?”

“I'll see you at noon,” Sam Gorman answered.

At sunrise three miles east of the Payboy on the mountain road that led to the Redhill-Silica highway, James Lee turned to his right and headed down the wooded slope that led to Mad Creek. The stream lay a thousand feet south of him at an elevation five or six hundred feet below the road.

Leaving the road for a little distance, he walked through a pine forest and then beyond a glade bright with the first blush of the morning sunlight he came to a thicket of ash and maple carpeted with a fragrant growth of tarweed. A congress of chattering bluejays attracted his attention. The blue-jay jamboree was being staged in the lower branches of a mountain laurel. Observing this, “Natural history be damned is their motto,” James Lee reflected. “No bluejay ever played around a bay tree before.... I'll have a look-see at this.”

Fifty feet from the mountain laurel he halted abruptly to watch with eager interest the retreat of a scurrying otter. “That's the first

time I ever saw one of those animals so far from water in the daylight," James Lee reflected. "I wonder what he's doing up here."

Under the laurel tree, after the protesting cries of the blue-jays had silenced, James Lee found the lure that had attracted them; the pungent bait that had brought the otter out of his Mad Creek home. Over an area of five feet in diameter the browning carpet of leaves under the laurel tree was spotted with the glint of little fish. "Minnows—baby trout," James Lee decided. Six feet to the left of the bluejays' banquet table, under a covering of decaying leaves that lay dark and wet against the lighter colors, James Lee found a canvas coin sack. Stenciled on the stained fabric in black paint he read the word "Payboy." A piece of four-strand cotton cord lay ten feet away. He picked up the cord. Parts of it were stained black. "We win again," he said, half aloud.

AT ELEVEN o'clock, to Walter Darrell in the Payboy office, "When Mr. Gorman comes into daylight tell him I've gone down to Colburn," he said.

Young Darrell nodded. "Fair enough. Hurry back. We'll play four-handed tonight and I'll add a thousand dollars to my bank account."

In Colburn, investigating Walter Darrell's bank account as his first bit of work in line of duty, James Lee spent ten minutes at the Colburn National Bank. Leaving there, he went direct to the offices of Sheriff Dutton in the county courthouse.

Greeting the sheriff after a moment, "I have a lead or two on this Payboy case," James Lee said. "Will you help me out on it?"

"I'll do anything you say," Sheriff Dutton announced heartily. "Melvin Armstrong just called me on long-distance. He told me to get word to you that Walter Darrell dropped two thousand dollars in a poker game at Jim Thome's place in San Francisco a month ago."

"I'll look him over tonight," James Lee said. "In the meantime hit this other detail with both feet. Arrest Jim Saunders. You'd

better step on it. I've a hunch this case breaks wide open tomorrow."

"I have a hunch you're haywire as hell," the sheriff objected. "Never mind, it's your funeral. I'm taking orders. What time are you going to be down here tomorrow?"

"I'll be down before noon."

"You're bringing Darrell with you, of course."

James Lee's mouth hardened. "I'll bring him in," he said.

An hour after midnight, when the four-handed poker game had ended, in seeming confidence to Sam Gorman, "I'm taking Walter Darrell down to Colburn tomorrow morning," Lee announced. "I want you to come along."

Sam Gorman's eyes widened in astonishment. "Have you got him cinched?"

"Not quite, but I think I can break him down. I don't want to make any false moves. The first thing we do is get him into the sheriff's office."

"I'll go with you. When do we start?"

"At ten o'clock tomorrow. Can you frame up some phony reason why you want him to go with us?"

"Plenty of 'em," Sam Gorman agreed.

AT TEN o'clock on the following day, carrying his suitcase, Sam Gorman stepped into James Lee's car with Walter Darrell. "I'm going on down to San Francisco for a couple of days," he explained, pointing to his suitcase. "I haven't had a day off for two months."

"All work and no play...." James Lee quoted.

In Sheriff Dutton's office with Sam Gorman and Walter Darrell after greetings had been exchanged, significantly, "Did you see Jim Saunders?" James Lee asked.

Sheriff Dutton nodded vehemently.

"Get a confession out of him?"

“Complete. Got one of the bricks and a mint certificate for the other one.”

James Lee nodded toward Sam Gorman. Then to the sheriff, “Book the next man,” he said.

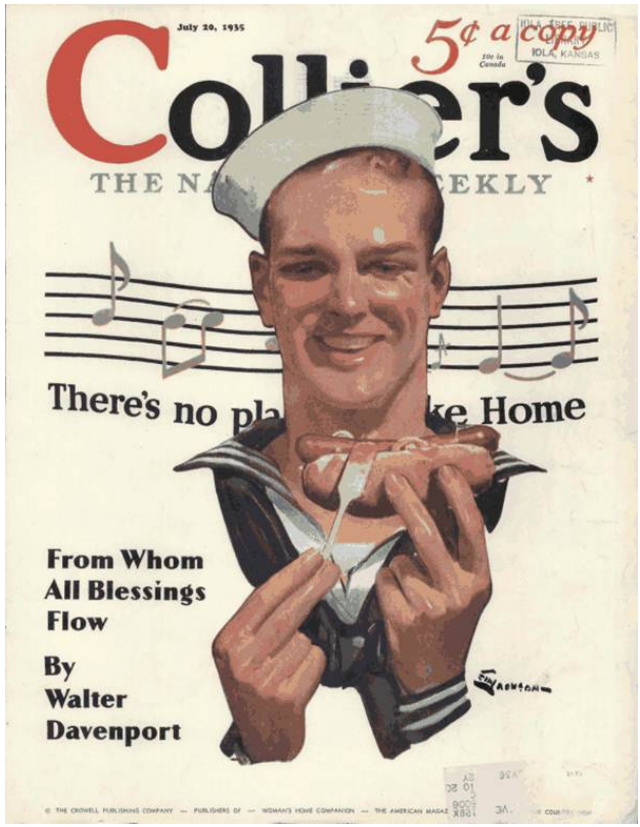
Sam Gorman's mouth hardened. “You damned lousy Chink,” he snarled, reaching back for a gun, “I'll blast you from here to Oregon!”

“Steady!” James Lee said quietly. A black automatic in his right hand punched suddenly into Gorman's stomach. “You're through. Next time when you tie up a gold sack don't use a piece of iodine-stained curtain cord out of your own bedroom. Next time when you park a gold brick in a can of fish you'd better tell your right bower not to dump the fish under a laurel tree. Bluejays don't like laurel trees.”

“What are you talking about?”

James Lee scowled at the superintendent of the Payboy Mine. “I'm talking about the curtain cord in your bedroom and a convention of wild life that I found on Mad Creek,” James Lee said quietly. “All the bluejays on earth had rallied round a little mess of trout that Saunders emptied out of one of his fish cans. I'm talking about that four-stranded curtain cord in the west window of your bedroom. Iodine on it. Iodine on the piece I found in the woods. Tough luck, big boy. You can try it again twenty years from now when you get out.”

After reporting to Melvin Armstrong in San Francisco, “Thanks for the compliments,” James Lee demurred, interrupting Armstrong's outburst of enthusiastic admiration. “I don't deserve them. Darrell's bank balance was fairly large. But his deposits, since the robbery, had been normal ones. That didn't clear him, of course. It looks as though luck did. Mostly luck—luck with the trout fishing, luck at the poker game and my happening to remember the stained curtain cord in Gorman's room when I dug up the Payboy coin sack that had held the second brick.... Old Wong Low reminded me of one of our ancient proverbs when the sheriff turned him loose. 'The eyes of the blind need no ointment.' Sometimes it isn't so much what you see as how you look at it.”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There's no pla ke Home
From Whom All Blessings Flow
By Walter Davenport
IOLA, KANSAS

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Collier's, September 14 1935

Mr. Wong:

SCORNED WOMAN

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

illustrated by Irving Nurick

A mystery story with as many quick twists as you'll find in a Chinatown alley. And that curious detective, James Lee, the deep one, again on the job

Hugh Wiley—Scorned Woman. James Lee Wong—in the very nick of time. Page 12

IN SAN FRANCISCO, behind the scenes in the Green Moon Theater, working at a make-up box in the thin light of two fragrant candles, the Demon of Darkness, Gin Chow, a Shanghai man, painted his face with the traditional black and vermilion lineaments of his role. Six feet away from him, seated on a costume chest, Rose Irwin, slim and beautiful, sketched this bit of the scene backstage to the mild annoyance of the Demon of Darkness. When her color notes were complete the girl went on to one of the dressing rooms wherein, sprawled on a pile of costume chests, half a dozen servants of the actors lay drugged with the fumes of the third-grade opium with which their masters supplied them.

A single yellow bulb furnished the faint illumination for this scene. The girl, sketching rapidly, confined her work to the distorted faces of her subjects. She had finished the countenance of the fourth man from a favorable angle when a message whispered by a Chinese woman interrupted her.

"You must leave at once," the Chinese woman advised. "The Master of the Chests forbids your presence."

Rose Irwin frowned at the Chinese woman for a moment and then surrendered. "Thank you," she said. She hid her sketch block

quickly under her coat and walked rapidly along the narrow passageway to the stairs that led back of the stage box. Here, pausing a moment to survey the several dark forms standing in the aisle that led to the foyer of the theater, she dropped a narrow veil across her eyes from the brim of her blue felt hat and walked forward resolutely toward the entrance of the theater.

On the street she turned directly toward her apartment in Ross Alley. She entered Ross Alley from Jackson Street. At a weather-beaten doorway she turned into the comparative sanctuary of the darkness that obscured a flight of stairs that led to the second story of the battered old building. In her studio her Chinese maid greeted her.

"Two Chinese men here while you were gone," the maid said. "They were bad men. I am afraid for you."

Rose Irwin handed her coat to the Chinese girl. She smiled at the girl. "Is it proper that a tigress should be afraid of rabbits?... Please pour me a cup of tea."

Rose Irwin sketched this bit of scene backstage, to the mild annoyance of the Demon of darkness

ON THE first night of the First Moon, San Francisco Chinatown picked up a little momentum in the early stages of its annual celebration.

Two hours after midnight a plane roared down out of the dark

sky forty miles south of San Francisco. The plane made a perfect three-point landing on the first fairway of the Los Altos golf course. From a long, black touring car that waited on the open road that parallels the first fairway two men trotted toward the plane. Forthwith, across a hundred feet of turf that separated the plane from the touring car, these two men, aided by the pilot of the plane, carried three heavy boxes from the plane to the car.

The driver of the ear cackled a quick command to the pilot of the plane. Speaking in guttural Cantonese, “Make haste,” he said. “Return to your sanctuary. You have done well.”

In Chinatown four hours before dawn, while the local night was tortured with the din of exploding strings of firecrackers, the black touring car slowed to a stop in front of the Double Blessing butcher shop. The Dragon, eating the thin stars of the night for his first meal of the New Year, retreated in a gray dawn that revealed a wet street blotched with a crimson debris of shattered firecrackers. An hour after the dawn of the first day of the First Moon, Grant Avenue had quieted down.

Thirty feet from where Ross Alley opens into Jackson Street the huddled form of a dead man lay in the gutter.

“He's a Chinaman about forty years old,” a member of the Chinatown squad reported to the desk sergeant over the telephone. “Nothing on him for identification. None of these local Chinks seem to know him.”

“Bring him in,” the desk sergeant ordered. “How was he killed?”

“He was shot in the back.”

“Shot or stabbed?”

“Listen, Cap, you never seen a knife hot enough to singe a man's coat, did you?”

“Bring him in,” the desk sergeant said.

In the Cave of Harmony, twenty feet under Grant Avenue, gravity marked the countenance of old Sung Kong. Facing four of the elders of Chinatown, he removed his heavy silver spectacles. “Tsao-sui-liao,” he whispered. “We have met with disaster! I suggested to you a year ago that it were better to endure persecution than to follow depraved courses.”

“We will not forget the benefits conferred by your wisdom,” one of the old Chinese men answered presently. “I must remind you that this is a world of darkness. Under your former plan seven of our brothers in the Central Glory were destroyed.”

Sung Kong nodded slowly. “You are of clear perception,” he said to his critic. “I admit that we have failed. There is but one recompense to virtue.”

“Enough!” A third member of the group banged an empty porcelain wine cup down on the teakwood table. “Enough of yesterday. There is no help for it. As one practical suggestion whereby we may regain the lost harmony, enjoy sweet after bitter, I suggest that we present our problem to the genius who serves the American government.”

“Our countryman, James Lee Wong?”

The old man nodded. “We cannot forget that more than once he has led us out of the place of death.”

A cackling chorus of approving voices followed. Old Sung Kong nodded. “I will ask our countryman, James Lee, to serve us once again,” he said. “I will transfer the burden of our problem to his shoulders.”

IN THE library of James Lee's apartment, greeting the Chinese operative of the Department of Justice, old Sung Kong, following the Ritual of Right Conduct, removed his silver-bowed spectacles and shook hands with himself three times. “Long life, great wealth,” Sung Kong said in Cantonese. Then, fitting his language to the locale of his problem, “I hope you enjoy the Eight Blessings.”

At this, bowing to the elder man, after a quick mental review of the Eight Blessings, James Lee smiled. “The eighth blessing is unattainable,” he reminded Sung Kong. “I enjoy at least five of them.” .

“Faithful wife, dutiful sons?”

James Lee shook his head. “You know that I have yet to enjoy six and seven. Will you have wine?”

“Presently. At the moment the realm of my intellect is sufficiently foggy without obscuring it with the vapors of wine.”

“Life is a labyrinth. Your feet have strayed from the Middle Pathway?”

The old man nodded slowly. “My weary feet have lost the Central Pathway,” he admitted. “I have come to ask your guidance.”

“How can the eyebrows of youth compare with the beard of age?”

“Thou art of clear perception. The elder council in this colony of your countrymen here in the land of the foreign devils enjoyed communion in the Cave of Harmony. I am delegated to ask you to aid us.”

James Lee reached for a cigarette. “What is your problem?” he asked, speaking gently to the troubled Sung Kong.

“You know of our interest in the affairs in the Central Glory?” Sung Kong asked.

For a moment a whimsical smile lighted the corners of James Lee's mouth. Before he could speak, “Accept my apologies for that question,” Sung Kong requested. “To open my heart let me say that among the contributions to the war chest of government not the least important are the various sums of money remitted by my associates in the Cave of Harmony. Our latest project has failed. Fang Yut engineered it.”

“You mean that he bought the opium Gin Chow shipped to Mexico last month? The stuff that was brought up by airplane?”

Sung Kong nodded. “Fang Yut arranged for the purchase,” he admitted. “Two hundred thousand dollars is no mean sum of money.”

“Is that why Gin Chow was murdered?”

“Could there be another reason?”

James Lee frowned. “Gin Chow was notoriously an agent of the Nanking government.”

“Your words are adorned with truth,” Sung Kong admitted. “Nevertheless we think that Gin Chow was killed by a common thief. On the night that Fang Yut collected the money for the opium shipment he gave it to Gin Chow. He undertook to guard Gin Chow to the Cave of Harmony.”

“Where was the money paid over to Gin Chow?” James Lee asked.

“In Fang Yut's residence.”

“Do you mean his apartment over the Double Blessing butcher shop?”

“That was where Gin Chow received the money.”

“What does Fang Yut say?”

“His testimony to the agents of the police department is simple enough. A man with a drawn revolver confronted Fang Yut and Gin Chow in Ross Alley near Jackson Street. Gin Chow naturally attempted to defend himself. Forthwith he was killed.”

“Shot in the back as I remember,” James Lee observed. “Retreat was never Gin Chow's idea of defense.”

Sung Kong's eyes narrowed. “When Fang Yut recovers it might be well to question him further about that detail.”

“Fang Yut is ill?” James Lee asked blandly.

Old Sung Kong nodded. “The demons of torture have invaded his body.”

James Lee's level glance lifted to a clock on the mantel over the fireplace in his library. “I will be glad to help you with your problem,” he said quickly. “You will excuse me now.” An air of impatience marked his words. “Time is an arrow.”

With mild, disgruntled surprise at the quick termination of the conference, old Sung Kong got to his feet. “Good luck, long life,” he said quickly to the federal operative. Making a final obeisance at the entrance, “Seven sons to mourn at your grave,” the elder Chinese concluded, shaking hands with himself three times.

James Lee smiled. “Can't you think of anything more cheerful than a grave?” he asked, violating the Ritual of Right Conduct.

Old Sung Kong blinked. “Eight Blessings,” he mumbled, shuffling away toward the street that led to the Cave of Harmony.

"He lies!" Lily Fang said. "The woman is in that room."

THE street doors of the Double Blessing butcher shop were closed when James Lee arrived. Twenty feet from the main entrance of the shop, north on Grant Avenue, on a door which opened to a stairway leading to Fang Yut's living rooms above his store, two streamers of white cotton cloth bore replicas painted in vermilion ink of Fang Yut's family names.

Following an interval of two minutes after James Lee had knocked on the door, "What do you desire?" a voice asked from within.

"I am Fang Yut's friend," James Lee said.

"Your name?"

James Lee spoke his name. The door opened. "You are welcome to this house of sorrow," one of Fang Yut's servants on sentinel duty recited in a hollow voice.

"The Dragon...."

"My master ascended on the Dragon on the fourth hour of morning."

"The priests?"

"My mistress, Lily Fang, will have no traffic with the agents of the Seventh Heaven."

"The unimportant journey—Fang Yut returns to earth to sleep in his grave on the third seventh day?"

"Old ways are forgotten," the servant answered. "Tomorrow the

shell of my master's spirit will be transported to its earthly sanctuary."

"Where is the place of burial?"

"Presently my master will sleep close beside the graves of his ancestors. For a little while he will wait in his tomb on the southern slope of Sleeping Willow Hill."

"Your mistress, the lady Lily Fang?"

"She is prostrate with sorrow at my master's passing."

After a moment, with a quick glance at the sentinel servant of Fang Yut's house, "Here is a dollar," James Lee said. "Enjoy a libation of good black wine." He handed the man a dollar bill. "On the official documents relating to the deplorable event what reason was assigned for Fang Yut's death?"

"The white doctors decided that my master died from an overdose of opium. It was so recorded," the servant answered. "Long life, seven sons." The sentinel servant bowed low.

James Lee smiled. "Enjoy your wine. After a typhoon there are plums to gather."

FANG YUT'S funeral seemed to James Lee to be mildly spectacular.

When the limousine carrying Lily Fang passed the window through which James Lee was observing the parade of death he noted that no tears lay below the closed lids of the widow's eyes. He stepped outdoors quickly and, still observing the grief-stricken Lily Fang, he elbowed his way through the throng, keeping the grieving woman well in view. Suddenly, as if surfeited with the calisthenics of her grief, Lily Fang opened her eyes. She reached her smooth, white hand with its slim, tapering fingers out toward a maid who crouched at her feet. James Lee saw her select a shred of candied coconut from a little wicker basket that the maid had held up to her. Lily Fang permitted her slim white hand to convey the sweetmeat to her vermilion lips. Then, closing her eyes, she resigned herself again to her wailing and to the sorrowful job of rolling her head from side to side.

"Coconut candy!" James Lee reflected. "Lily Fang and her false

tears!" After a moment, "If a woman loves a man she does not gorge herself on coconut candy on the way to his grave.... Lily Fang's tears of grief are phony!"

James Lee missed one important incident in the progress of the funeral procession. Half a block from the portals of the Stockton Street tunnel the parade, turning north on Stockton Street, was halted for a moment by a brawl that centered about a slim American girl. The girl was Rose Irwin and the occasion for the melee was her attempt to photograph the funeral procession of Fang Yut. From a packing box in the front of Moy Gow's store the girl made five exposures with her camera, shooting variously Lily Fang and her decorated limousine, the hired mourners, the hearse and the twelve trailing priests behind this vehicle of death.

A sudden clash between two Chinese at Rose Irwin's feet spread until ten struggling men were involved. Crashing into the packing case on which she stood, the fighting crew dethroned the slim girl in one surging rush. A Chinese man helped her to her feet. Thirty seconds later, from a point twenty feet away from the girl, another Chinese elbowed his way to her side. In his hand he held the broken remains of the camera that she had used. "More better you not stay here," the man said in pidgin, handing Rose Irwin her camera.

When she had returned to her studio she opened the camera. The roll of film was missing.

Bringing her mistress a glass of brandy, "Two more bad men came to see you," the maid announced. "One man said very good if you leave San Francisco...."

The American girl frowned at her servant. "You are a silly fool," she said sharply. "Please make me a cup of tea."

At six o'clock in the evening of the day of Fang Yut's funeral, in his library James Lee called quickly to his house boy. Emphasis derived from a sudden decision marked his words. "I will not be here for dinner tonight. Bring me a heavy overcoat. Telephone Mr. Decker to come over here. Ask him to wait here until he hears from me."

The servant bowed. After a moment's silence, "What time will you come back?" he asked.

“Somewhere around midnight,” James Lee said, putting on his coat. “If I don't come back tonight fix the guest room for Mr. Decker.”

From his apartment James Lee walked rapidly to a garage half a block away, where he kept his car. He drove directly to the Green Moon Theater. When he had parked his car he entered the theater and made his way backstage. Here for three hours, mingling with the cast, he listened variously to the shrieking music, the falsetto voices and the clanging gongs that bored through the lines and business of a seemingly interminable play involving the suspicious husband in the pear garden. At eleven o'clock, during a moment when Ping Kuei, the beggar, sang of the day within the garden when his lady love divine, daughter of a wealthy noble, “promised that she would be mine,” James Lee with marked abruptness terminated a sketchy conversation with the man who had replaced the dead Gin Chow. “It is futile to wish you long life,” James Lee said caustically to this man. “More appropriately let me wish you good luck.... good night.”

MIDNIGHT found James Lee at the portals of the Chinese cemetery. Sleeping Willow Hill was shrouded with drifting wraiths of fog borne in from the cold Pacific. He made his way along a road lined with drooping cedars until he came to the tombs of the Wong family. Here, remembering the site that Fang Yut had picked for his own last resting place, he turned to the left across a turf soft with the first grasses of spring, electing to traverse this more direct route rather than to follow the roadway which led around the south slope of Sleeping Willow Hill. When he was a hundred feet away from Fang Yut's tomb he halted at the sound of a man's voice raised in angry exclamation. He heard eleven cackling syllables in the Cantonese dialect. “You fool! Trust a woman to ignore a warning! This will be the end of your interference.” There followed a woman's scream of anguish, and then this was muffled quickly to silence.

Ten seconds later the flaring beams of an automobile's headlights stabbed through the drifting fog.

“Someone seems to have beaten me to my first move in this game,” James Lee reflected. “A woman!”

He heard the snarling gears of the starter and then the roaring exhaust of the car's engine. “Kidnapped—they've got her! That means more trouble.”

He was eighty feet from the road around Sleeping Willow Hill when the car roared past him, racing toward the main highway. He remained quiet for four minutes after the car had gone and then he resumed his silent approach to Fang Yut's tomb. Twenty feet away from the portals of the ornamented structure he risked a three-second flash from an electric light that he carried. The door of Fang Yut's tomb was open. Without fear now, sensing the fact that Fang Yut's place of sepulcher was deserted, he stepped quickly to the side of the heavy coffin. He swung the piercing ray of his flashlight toward it. Fang Yut's coffin was empty.

“This affair is becoming a bit complicated,” James Lee reflected, starting back toward his car.

In the library of his apartment at one o'clock in the morning, greeting his associate, John Decker, who had been sleeping on the long couch fronting the fireplace, “Dash over to Fang Yut's joint and find out where his widow is,” James Lee directed. “I mean Lily Fang—she was his number one wife. Get back here right away.”

Decker nodded. “Check.... Wait a minute. I'm still half asleep.... There was a Chinese girl called in here to see you an hour ago. I tried to hold her but she insisted on returning to her own place.”

“Who was she?”

“She works for this American girl, Rose Irwin, the painter who lives here in Chinatown—the sweet little state narcotic operative.”

“What did she want?”

“She wanted you to find Rose Irwin for her. She said she was afraid that some of Fang Yut's outfit might have moved in on the little lady.”

James Lee scowled, and from his scowl it was evident that he believed that the fears of Rose Irwin's servant were not without a basis of probability. The scream he had heard at Fang Yut's tomb! He nodded quickly at Decker. “Fair enough! Round up the dope about Lily Fang and get back here on the run!”

John Decker came back with his report in eighteen minutes.

“Under the terms of Fang Yut's will Lily Fang was sold to Gat Mow. You know him, don't you?”

The federal operative nodded. “You forget that I dug up the evidence that socked him eight years ago in the white slave case. Has Lily Fang moved out of her house?”

“She headed for Stockton ten hours ago.”

James Lee scowled at the telephone on his desk for twenty seconds. Then with a quickened animation in his voice, “You know what Gat Mow is doing now, don't you?” he asked.

Decker nodded. “Running a gambling joint on an ark boat somewhere in the Stockton delta. Is that right?”

“That's part of his game. He bought the old Six Pleasures a year ago and rigged it up with a couple of added attractions. He's branched out with two more rackets besides gambling. I had a report on him a month ago. His big money still comes from his fan-tan game but lately he has been able to supply his customers with hop and women.... Listen to me, boy, we've got to move in on Gat Mow tonight! Have you got your guns with you?”

“I've got 'em both,” Decker answered.

“You will need them,” James Lee said.

THE Six Pleasures, which had been lately renamed the “Ting Cho”—“Pavilion of Luxury”—was an eighty-foot scow drawing a scant three feet.

Five hours after midnight, with John Decker in the stern of a skiff that he had borrowed from some unknown owner who had moored it on the west bank of Middle River, James Lee rowed a thousand feet downstream from Lady Island to where the Ting Cho lay.

Quietly to John Decker as they neared the Ting Cho, “Remember the play,” James Lee repeated. “Don't blast unless you have to. We go into the gambling-room through that door on the forward deck. Keep everybody covered until I get the bracelets on Gat Mow. If he's in his own quarters on the upper deck you may have to come up and lend me a hand, because it's a million to one that Fang Yut will be with him.”

“I got you,” Decker said. “I still think there's mighty slim evidence back of your theory that Fang Yut is alive.”

“Lily Fang wasn't drowning any real tears in candied coconut,” James Lee protested. “I know Chinese women better than you do.... All right, hop to it! Up you go.... Here, make her fast to the rail.”

The thin whining strains of a Chinese banjo played by a slave girl furnished the overture for John Decker's entrance into the gambling-room of the Ting Cho. At this early hour of the morning the gambling play had quieted, but twenty patrons still remained at the fan-tan table.

Decker walked into the scene with his hands down. Ten feet beyond the entrance door he leveled two black automatics at the players around the fan-tan table. “This is not a hold-up,” he said evenly, barely loud enough for the assemblage to hear him. Then over his shoulder to James Lee, “Make it snappy, Chief,” he called. “I think you've got Gat Mow at the table.... Up at the head end with that Filipino girl.”

“That's him.” James Lee walked quickly to Gat Mow's side. “Hands behind you!”

Gat Mow smiled thinly at James Lee. “Good evening, traitor,” he said. “Why must you....”

“Shut up! This is a time for silence!” A pair of handcuffs clicked about Gat Mow's wrists. “The keys to your rooms?”

“This is a time for silence,” Gat Mow repeated, sneering at his captor.

“And action.” A preliminary exploration of Gat Mow's raiment brought forth a stubby, short-barreled, blue .38 and a bunch of keys. “You wait here,” James Lee said to Gat Mow. “If you move, my man will shoot you.” To John Decker, “Hold everybody right here. I'm going topside.”

James Lee walked quietly up the narrow stairway that led to the upper deck. At the head of the stairs he turned to his right. With a preliminary greeting, imitating Gat Mow's voice as best he could, he tried the heavy door that led to Gat Mow's private rooms. To his surprise the door was unlocked. As it opened, from within he heard a harsh challenge. The voice was Fang Yut's voice. James Lee

leveled the gun in his right hand at the shadowed sanctuary of a bunk built into the west wall of the cabin. A woman screamed and in the high falsetto of her alarm James Lee recognized Lily Fang.

"Fang Yut, move and I kill you!" James Lee said. "Stand up! This is the first hour of your destruction."

"I will return the money," Fang Yut began. "I will pay you...."

"You will pay for killing Gin Chow with your life!" James Lee interrupted. Then, "Where is the white girl?"

Fang Yut scowled. "I have no traffic in white girls."

Instantly, spending a venomous jealousy in one screaming accusation, "He lies!" Lily Fang said. "The woman is in that room!"

James Lee nodded toward Lily Fang. "When this typhoon blows over there will be ripe pears for you to gather," he promised, speaking in Cantonese. Covering Fang Yut with his gun James Lee reached into the side pocket of his overcoat for a pair of handcuffs. He threw the jingling steel at Lily Fang's feet. "Hold your hands in front of you," he said to Fang Yut, and then to Lily Fang, "Chain him to the bars of that window.... Press them tight around his wrists.... Thank you. A dutiful wife is her husband's greatest treasure."

Still wary, reluctant to turn away from his captive, James Lee walked to his left, to the locked door of the room wherein Rose Irwin was imprisoned. The fourth key that he tried from the dangling collection of Gat Mow's key ring fitted the lock. The heavy door swung inward. In the obscurity of the unlighted room James Lee saw the figure of the slim American girl lying inert on a couch in the corner. He called to her, "Miss Irwin!"

There was no reply.

Intervening to calm James Lee's fears, "She is unharmed," Lily Fang assured him. "She is not hurt—but Fang Yut drugged her tea. She will wake up after the first hour of daylight."

AT NINE o'clock, fully conscious after her perilous sleeping, "I can never thank you, Mr. Lee, for what you've done!" Rose Irwin said.

James Lee smiled at the girl. “You can do two things for me,” he began. “As the first expression of your gratitude I would like to have you resign from the state narcotic bureau as soon as we get to San Francisco.”

Rose Irwin frowned at her companion. “But I love the work,” she protested. “It is fascinating. You will forgive me if I boast a bit—I broke the Headland case single-handed. I rounded up the Revell outfit after your people had let them escape. I trailed Walter Crow from Sacramento to Honduras—and brought him back alive. There was the....”

Interrupting the recital, James Lee lifted his hand. “Permit me to make my second request. After you resign your state narcotic job I want you to make one quick jump to the Department of Justice. You're the smartest woman I ever knew. We need you in our business.”

“I'll give the department the best I have,” Rose Irwin answered in delighted acceptance....

IN THE Cave of Harmony twenty feet under Grant Avenue, with old Sung Keng beside him, James Lee faced seven of the elder governors of San Francisco's Chinatown. “I have decided to give the Nanking government the funds which you derived from your unworthy enterprise,” he announced. “The United States government holds Gat Mow a prisoner. The opium that went to the burial place in Fang Yut's coffin has been destroyed. Any further participation on your part in the opium traffic will mean that all of you will end your lives in a federal prison. Finally, in the interests of justice I shall surrender Fang Yut to you. He has confessed to me that he killed Gin Chow.”

“He probably killed the man that lay dead in his house when the coroner came,” old Sung Kong interrupted.

“Perhaps that is true,” James Lee answered. “Fang Yut did not confess to that ... I have one favor to ask of you—when the moment comes for Fang Yut to bid farewell to life....”

“One thousand slices of his flesh—slow with a small knife so that he may suffer ten thousand years of torture,” a kindly-faced ancient of Chinatown suggested.

“A quick death with the drug of sleep,” James Lee countered. “I demand that you do not use the ancient methods of torture.”

AFTER a moment's deliberation old Sung Kong nodded slowly.

“It shall be as you desire.”

There was another longer period of silence broken finally by the thin, rasping voice of the fragile old Wang Lin. “The American painter girl?” Wang Lin asked. “Is she still to be numbered with the annoying insects of this region?”

“She has resigned her job with the state narcotic bureau,” James Lee announced, ornamenting the gold of truth with the brass of fact.

Old Wang Lin smiled thinly. “She has attained wisdom at an early age,” he commented. “Hola! Now that the storm has passed let us enjoy a cup of wine.”

***

Collier's, November 2, 1935

Mr. Wong:

THREE WORDS

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

James Lee, the subtle, in another murder mystery, wherein a killer raises a question—and answers it

James Lee examines a Japanese

Looking intently at James Lee, "Please accept my apologies." Howard Lin said quickly. "I am happy to make appropriate obeisance to a Chinese scholar"

ILLUSTRATED BY
IRVING NURICK

Looking intently at James Lee, “Please accept my apologies.”

Howard Lin said quickly. “I am happy to make appropriate obeisance to a Chinese scholar.”

ON THE day before his expedition started west from Peiping, Alan Markham turned a collection of minor details over to Howard Lin, his Chinese assistant, and resigned himself to an afternoon's relaxation. The Chihli Plate was being run and a ten-dollar bet on a Mongol pony named Princess brought him a hundred silver dollars.

That night to Howard Lin, “We're starting lucky. I won at the races today,” he said.

Lin smiled at his chief. “I hope we have the same luck west of the Little Gobi.”

“We'll have plenty of luck,” Markham predicted.

Against this prediction Old Man Trouble rode with the explorers for a thousand miles across the desert and then, beaten to a pulp, he was driven to retreat by the superior forces of Lady Luck.

Returning to the United States eighteen months after his departure from Peiping, Markham brought to Berkford University a treasure of ancient manuscripts and trophies in stone and metal that had been recovered from the haunted sands of the Takla Makan.

Howard Lin came back to the university with his chief to help Markham with some of the translations of the manuscript. A month after Markham had finished his preliminary report, and while he was still engaged with his first general classification of the earlier documents that had been found in a cliff south of the Tarim River, he was discovered dead in his residence.

TO THE coroner's jury, testifying relative to Alan Markham's death, “I saw his hand sticking out of the window about ten minutes after four in the morning,” Peter Barton said. “I only been working for the Jersey Dairy since November last year, but all the time since I begun delivering down the peninsula the

professor took a quart a day. His hand was caught in the window screen and it was kind of bloody on the wrist. There was not much blood."

Q: What did you do when you saw the dead man's hand?

A: I was scared. I called out, "Hey, Professor!" and then I stood up and looked inside the bathroom. The light was burning. He was hanging down from his hand where it was caught in the screen window. I run to my truck and headed for the first telephone I thought of down at the Nite Bite Lunchery on the highway.

Q: To whom did you telephone?

A: First I got two nickels for a dime from the cook. And then I called up the police department.

Q: Not the sheriff of the county?

A: No, sir. I never give him a thought.

The records show that Sergeant Miller of the police department was informed of the discovery of Professor Markham's body at 4:16 a.m. Forthwith upon receipt of the information Sergeant Miller directed Peter Barton to return to Professor Markham's house.

Sergeant Miller then called Dr. Garner and, after informing him of the milkman's discovery, requested Dr. Garner to meet him at once at Professor Markham's house on the campus.

After he had completed his call to Dr. Garner, Sergeant Miller put another call through for Harvey Ainsworth, the comptroller of the university.

Sergeant Miller arrived at Professor Markham's house at 4:35 a.m., at which time he found the milkman, Pete Barton, and the comptroller of the university, Harvey Ainsworth, in the house.

QUESTIONED by the coroner, Sergeant Miller testified in part as follows:

Q: Where was Professor Markham's body when you got to the house?

A: He was still hanging by his wrist from the screen window in his bathroom.

Q: You walked into the bathroom?

A: The first thing I done when I got to the professor's house after I seen Mr. Ainsworth and the milkman was to walk in and look at the dead man.

Q: How did you know he was dead?

A: Anybody could tell he was dead.

Q: Did you feel his pulse, listen to his heart?

A: There wasn't any need of that. Dr. Garner got there while the three of us was talking. The first thing he said after he spoke to Mr. Ainsworth, when he saw the body, was that the professor was dead.

Q: Of suicide or murder or death from natural causes, which did you instinctively decide upon? That is—I mean, did you have any ideas on this subject?

A: No, sir. The only thing I thought of was burglary. I kind of looked at the professor to see if he was shot or hit in the head with something or anything.

To Howard Lin, a Chinese: You were well acquainted with Professor Markham?

A: I have been studying with Professor Markham for two years.

Q: He employed you as an assistant?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: When did you last see Professor Markham alive?

A: I had supper with him on Friday evening. He told me we would have an early supper because he had a lot of work to do that night.

Q: What time did you last see him alive?

A: About nine o'clock that night.

Q: Mr. Lin, in the professor's bathroom did you see the bottle

containing the poison that killed him?

A: Yes, sir. It was standing on the glass shelf above the wash bowl in the bathroom.

Q: Did you touch the bottle?

A: No, sir. It was none of my business. My chief was always taking some kind of medicine for his indigestion.

Following Howard Lin, Dr. Lyman Garner was sworn in by the coroner.

To Dr. Garner, “We can dispose of the formalities, Doctor,” the coroner said. “Please tell us in plain language what you discovered at the time you found Professor Markham's, body.”

A: The man was dead. Death was due to poison. The poison was hydrocyanic acid.

Q: Have you any theory as to how Professor Markham's wrist happened to be caught in the screen window of his bathroom?

A: Paralysis of respiration is one of the characteristics of a fatal dose of hydrocyanic acid. The symptoms are those of sudden and complete asphyxia. A full dose produces a sudden paralysis of the heart. A smaller amount, still fatal, might permit some volitional movements to be made before death. In my opinion, Professor Markham attempted in his last moments of life to open his bathroom window and fell dead at that moment. The odor of the hydrocyanic acid was unmistakable in the residue of contained air in the professor's lungs.

Q: Dr. Garner, would you say that the professor committed suicide?

A: I cannot say yes or no to that question. The broken tumbler on the bathroom floor had contained a solution of hydrocyanic acid. A small bottle containing a strong solution of hydrocyanic acid was on the glass shelf above the wash bowl in the bathroom.

Q: Did you record a description of the bottle and its label? ... Of course, Doctor, you understand we require your answer to the question merely for the record.

A: I understand. The bottle was a two-ounce bottle. The

stopper was some composition substance covering a glass tube similar to an eye dropper with a rubber bulb at the end so that the dosage could be measured.

Q: Pardon me, Doctor, how much of the solution was in the bottle? Was it full?

A: Practically full.

Q: Was the stopper in the bottle when you saw it?

A: No, sir, it was lying on the glass shelf above the wash bowl.

Q: Do you recognize this bottle as being the one that contained the poison?

A: It looks like the same bottle.

Interruption by Sergeant Miller: “Excuse me. I made a record of the label on the bottle. It was Prescription No. 77,853 from Ehrmann's Pharmacy. Dr. Emmett prescribed it.”

The coroner nodded to Sergeant Miller. “Thank you,” he said.

“Dr. Emmett is up at Lake Tahoe on a vacation,” Sergeant Miller continued. “I telephoned him this morning. He said he never prescribed no poison for the professor.”

With mild impatience the chief inquisitor nodded again at Sergeant Miller. “Just a moment, Sergeant,” he suggested. “I have not finished with Dr. Garner.”

Then, resuming with Dr. Garner: Doctor, have you any theory as to why the deceased should have possessed a bottle of deadly poison?

A: The only thing that occurs to me is that in writing the prescription Dr. Emmett may have used an ambiguous contraction in Latin that might mean either hydrocyanic acid or hydrochloric acid. Hydrochloric acid may be useful in atonic dyspepsia and acidity of the stomach.

Q: And such an ambiguous contraction might result fatally to the patient?

A: Yes, indeed. A great many physicians in their ignorance of case endings in Latin grammar are apt to...

Interrupting Dr. Garner: “Thank you, Doctor,” the coroner said. “We will have Mr. Ehrmann sworn—and his pharmacist, Mr. Frank Ramsay.”

Presently to Ludwig Ehrmann: You are the proprietor of Ehrmann's Pharmacy?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: From your records, who compounded Prescription No. 77,853 dated on the label on this bottle 7-26-35?

A. My junior pharmacist, Mr. Frank Ramsay.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Ehrmann. That is all....

Q: Mr. Ramsay? Do you recognize the label on this bottle?

A: Yes, sir, I wrote the typewriting on it.

Q: I asked you to bring your file of prescriptions with you. Have you got the original prescription for the contents of this bottle, written by Dr. Emmett?

A: Yes, sir, I brought the file with me.

TO HIS associates when the prescription of Ehrmann's Pharmacy had been presented in evidence, “Gentlemen, you see that this prescription is one of those 'ambiguous contractions of the Latin term' that Dr. Garner told us about. You will read in the first line of Dr. Emmett's prescription in his handwriting, 'Acid. Hydroc' Dr. Garner tells us that the term might mean either hydrochloric or hydrocyanic acid and that the first chemical in small doses might be harmless, while a few drops of the second chemical which killed Professor Markham would mean death. I regret to say that it becomes necessary to assume that young Mr. Frank Ramsay made an error in compounding the prescription.”

At this, springing to his feet, “Mr. Ramsay made no error in compounding the prescription,” Ludwig Ehrmann protested. “What sort of a fool would do a thing like that? You see on the label the prescription was dispensed by F.R. and checked by L.E. —that means me—'Ludwig Ehrmann.' We never make mistakes.”

The coroner smiled thinly. “So you never make mistakes, Mr.

Ehrmann.... There is always a first time. Maybe this is your first mistake."

"We have never made a mistake with a prescription," Mr. Ehrmann exploded. "In thirty-five years! We carry no cyanide in solution. It is in crystals."

The coroner nodded coldly. "Thank you, Mr. Ehrmann. Please be seated."

"Gott im Himmel!" Mr. Ehrmann exploded, glaring in anger at the coroner. "Yes! I will be seated." He resumed his chair heavily.

When Mr. Ehrmann was seated there was a moment's silence and then to the foreman of the jury, "It is reasonably evident that Professor Markham came to his death because of an error made in compounding a medicine prescribed by Dr. Emmett. It is a reasonable assumption that the pharmacist who filled the prescription, Mr. Frank Ramsay, is culpable. I request you to bring in a verdict of accidental death by hydrocyanic acid solution self-administered. I recommend that the pharmacist, Mr. Frank Ramsay, be held on a technical charge of manslaughter."

TURNING to the young pharmacist, "This, of course, is highly unfortunate for you, Mr. Ramsay, but it seems to be the only course I can take in the matter.... There is, however, one more witness to testify—Ota Haruki."

"I am a student in the university," Haruki affirmed. "I have been attending Professor Markham's classes."

Q: You work for the professor?

A: Yes, sir. I cook supper for him three or four times a week.

Q: He had other servants?

A: No, sir.

Q: When did you last see him alive?

A: Friday evening about nine o'clock.

Q: Was the Chinese, Howard Lin, with him at the time?

A: No, sir. Lin left before nine.

Q: What about this bottle that contained the poison—did you see it?

A: Yes, sir. It was in the bathroom on the glass shelf above the wash bowl.

The coroner nodded at Haruki: “Thank you, that is all.”

THREE DAYS after young Frank Ramsay, charged with manslaughter, was released on bail, Ota Haruki called at the office of the comptroller of Berkford University.

Facing the comptroller, “There was one matter relative to the death of Professor Alan Markham that was not brought out at the coroner's inquest,” the Japanese stated. “I would like to ask your advice.”

After the Japanese left the comptroller's office, Ainsworth put a call through to San Francisco for James Lee. “This Markham case, Mr. Lee,” Ainsworth began. “I would like to talk to you about it. There is a new angle. Can I see you tonight?”

“Nine o'clock at my apartment in San Francisco—would that suit you?”

“Excellent, thank you. I will see you at nine o'clock.”

That night, “This Markham affair has become definitely complicated by a new element,” Ainsworth said to James Lee.

“One of Markham's students, a young Japanese who worked for him around the house, insists that Markham was murdered.”

James Lee nodded.

“That is probable.”

“You are familiar with the case?” Surprise lay in Ainsworth's voice.

“We have a transcript of the coroner's records in the department's local files. The Japanese is Ota Haruki?”

“Yes—Haruki. He outlined evidence that makes me feel almost sure that Markham was murdered.”

"By whom?"

"By Howard Lin. Lin was helping Markham with the translations of the manuscripts that the expedition brought back. There is good reason, I think, to suspect that Lin is guilty of Markham's murder."

James Lee closed his eyes for a moment. "The motive?" he asked.

"Treasure! A million dollars—maybe five million dollars for the first man who finds it."

Smiling thinly, "Sailing directions complete from A to Z set forth at length in some old manuscript?"

"That's it exactly! The manuscript has disappeared from Markham's collection. Beside Markham, Howard Lin is the only man who had access to the lost document—that is, Lin is the only person who worked with Markham on classifying and translating the stuff."

"HOW does Haruki know it was a treasure manuscript?"

"Haruki overheard Lin reading the preliminary translation of the document to Markham on the night of his death."

"Where did Markham keep these manuscripts?"

"In the vaults at the Memorial Library. He worked at his residence, where he had his own photographic equipment."

"This work that Markham did at his house—did he return the manuscripts he was investigating to the Memorial Library vaults each night?"

"He kept them overnight in a fireproof file at his house. Locked."

"Mr. Ainsworth, Haruki's suspicions sound a bit thin," James Lee commented. "I wonder why Haruki made no mention of the missing document at the inquest."

"It was not a missing document at that time. One of the filing clerks at the library discovered the absence of the document after

the inquest."

"What do you want me to do, Mr. Ainsworth?"

"I want you to investigate Howard Lin."

"How do you think I had better proceed?" James Lee asked blandly.

"First of all, if I may presume to suggest a method to you, I would get the story straight from the Japanese."

"Why don't you have your local police work on it?" James Lee asked.

Harvey Ainsworth shook his head. "I'm afraid they'd be a bit out of their depth with ancient Chinese manuscripts and the Oriental mind. 'For ways that are dark,' if you will pardon the quotation."

James Lee smiled and then with a quick decision, "I will have a talk with Haruki," he said. "I will call at the university tomorrow at ten o'clock. Will you arrange for Haruki to meet me at your office at that hour?"

"He will be there waiting for you at that hour," Harvey Ainsworth promised.

At James Lee's invitation, Harvey Ainsworth was present during Lee's interview with Haruki.

Looking straight at the Japanese, "Mr. Ainsworth tells me that you suspect that Professor Markham was murdered," James Lee said.

Quietly, "I have reason to believe that to be the truth," Haruki answered. "May I ask you to hold my information in confidence?"

Lee nodded. "Naturally."

"It is not a quick story," Haruki began. "First of all, we know that Professor Markham died from poison. That poison was available in the professor's house. He had enough of it to kill a thousand men in the chemical supplies in his photographic laboratory. On the evening of the professor's death while I was at

work in the kitchen of his house I could not help but overhear his conversation with his Chinese assistant, Howard Lin. Lin was at work on a verbal translation of one of the manuscripts brought back from the last expedition in China. He read paragraphs of the manuscript in an even voice until suddenly he came upon something that served to excite him. The professor's interest and excitement seemed to increase at the same time."

"Do you recall any of the text that occasioned the professor's excitement?"

"I remember some of it. I will try to quote from memory. 'On this felicitous occasion the clouds of heaven congealed. The trees of the high mountains glittered with a dew of precious stones. The trees trembled when the gods spoke and the mountains received the stones. The earth seized and concealed the stones for thousands of years and heaven wept in happiness when Wu Wang was proclaimed ruler of the empire. On this happy day the precious stones locked in the high mountains were transported on the streams of heaven's tears to earth's treasury where two rivers meet, a day's journey east of the temple where Wu Wang spoke his vows of fealty to the people before he ascended to the jade throne....' That is the substance of the quotation from the manuscript that excited Professor Markham and Howard Lin so much."

Smiling at Haruki, "I must compliment you on the accuracy of your memory," James Lee said. He turned forthwith to address Harvey Ainsworth. "I wish you would telephone the police department and ask them to have an officer arrest Howard Lin and bring him in here immediately."

AINSWORTH nodded. "Lin is probably over at the Chinese department. We'll have him arrested wherever he is."

"Thank you." James Lee turned again to Haruki. "I think you have an exceptional memory. And your deductions have been most interesting. As a matter of fact, you have cleared up the case considerably in my mind."

"You believe, then, Mr. Lee, as I do?" Haruki asked quickly.

“What do you believe?”

“If I may presume to suggest it, there is no remaining doubt as to the motive in the case.”

“And that motive?”

Haruki hesitated. “A treasure in precious stones, of course. A treasure waiting a day's journey east of the temple where Wu Wang ascended to the jade throne—possession of that manuscript is just like having millions of dollars worth of diamonds and emeralds and rubies handed to you as a gift from the gods of Fortune.”

James Lee contemplated the end of his cigarette. “Well, of course, that's one way of looking at it,” he said. “I hadn't considered it in that light.... Of course, that would supply a motive. You assume, Haruki, that Lin killed the professor so that the detailed information as to the location of this treasure would belong exclusively to Lin?”

The smile on Haruki's face gave place to gravity. “Exactly,” he said.

“You make it all very clear,” James Lee complimented.

“Does Lin know that you overheard his translation?”

“I think not.”

Interrupting the scene, Harvey Ainsworth's secretary came into the office. “There is a police officer out here. He has Howard Lin with him,” the secretary said.

Ainsworth nodded. “Have them come in.”

After his introduction to the officer who held Howard Lin in custody, “I have been doing a little work on the Markham case,” James Lee explained. “Haruki here has some very interesting ideas relative to the case. He believes that Professor Markham was murdered.... I may add that I also believe that the professor was murdered.”

He turned to Howard Lin. “Do you happen to remember the text of the legend of Wu Wang's treasure?”

“Of course I remember it,” Howard Lin said sullenly. “Where is the Chinese scholar who doesn't know at least ten variations of that legend?”

“Could you recite it for me from memory following the line beginning, 'On this happy day'—?”

“The earlier versions or one of the later revisions?”

James Lee lifted his eyebrows. “I do not recall important variations in that section of the text.”

At this, looking intently at James Lee, “Please accept my apologies,” Howard Lin said quickly. “In you I recognized a countryman. Now I am happy to make appropriate obeisance to a Chinese scholar.” A new light had replaced the sullen fear in Howard Lin's eyes.

“Please favor us with a recital of the text continuing from the line that begins, 'On this happy day.'”

Easily and without hesitation, continuing the quotation, Howard Lin recited the requested paragraph: “'On this happy day the precious stones locked in the high mountains were transported by the streaming tears of Heaven to Earth's treasury where three rivers meet, a three days' journey west of the palace where Wu Wang spoke his vows of fealty to his people before he ascended to the jade throne.'”

“Thank you, Mr. Lin.” James Lee bowed to his countryman. “That is the text of the Wen Hien Tung Kao of the thirteenth century, isn't it? It seems to me that 'Heaven's streaming tears' was written 'the streams of Heaven's tears' in the earlier versions.”

HOWARD LIN'S face lighted with sincere pleasure. “Will you permit me to express my deep admiration?”

Frowning at this, dismissing the compliment, Lee turned to Ota Haruki and extended his cigarette case to the Japanese. “Have a cigarette,” he invited, and then speaking again to Howard Lin, “Mr. Haruki is familiar with part of the legend, but has not had our facilities for studying the ancient texts. For instance, he remembers the treasure as being located where *two* rivers

meet *one* day's journey *east* of the temple where Wu Wang spoke his vows."

To the Japanese, "You have it *east* instead of *west,* Haruki. *One* day's journey instead of *three. Two* rivers meeting instead of *three.* With those discrepancies in your sailing directions I am afraid you could spend your life in the Takla Makan without discovering the treasures of Wu Wang.... However, your recital was very interesting.... Why do you suppose Professor Markham and Mr. Lin became so greatly excited during the translation of the missing manuscript?"

Scowling, "It is natural for any man to become excited when millions in treasure lie within his grasp."

To Howard Lin, "Was that the reason for your excitement?"

"Naturally not," Lin said quietly. "But there was good reason for our enthusiasm. Do you remember, Mr. Lee, the date of the earliest existing text of the legend of Wu Wang's treasure?"

"I am not sure, but I think it is the Ling Soon text, dated early in the seventh century."

Howard Lin nodded. "Your memory is excellent. The missing manuscript that Professor Markham brought back with him, the manuscript that I was translating the night the professor died, dated two hundred years earlier than the Ling Soon text! It was written during the reign of the first of the Sung rulers! It antedates the Ling Soon text more than two hundred years!... You can understand Professor Mark-ham's delight—our excited mood."

JAMES LEE turned to Ota Haruki. "You seem to have been mistaken in one important detail of your analysis. A regrettable error, Haruki. The manuscript was a scholar's treasure—of no intrinsic value. Incidentally, if the thief who killed Professor Markham desired to conceal the missing manuscript, where do you suppose he would hide it?"

Haruki's face was suddenly suffused with a surge of blood from his raging heart.

"Why do you ask me that question?" he grated. "How should I

know....”

“I will ask you some simpler questions,” James Lee interrupted. “When you smoke a cigarette do you always keep your left arm so close to your body? Do you think the thief who poisoned Professor Markham might hide the manuscript in the lining of his coat? By any chance does the lining of your coat conceal the missing manuscript?”

Haruki leaped to his feet, his face livid with rage. “You Chinese devil!” he snarled. He lunged at James Lee, a knife gleaming in his hand.

“You seem to—have lost—your Oriental—composure,” James Lee suggested, combining four adroit bits of defense and attack with his suggestion.

Choking for breath and with his right arm twisted in James Lee's wrenching grip, Haruki dropped his knife.

James Lee nodded to the police officer who had sprung forward to help him. “Handcuffs,” he said briefly, and then to Haruki, “You have the manuscript with you?” he asked.

“Yes, you damned snake!” Haruki panted.

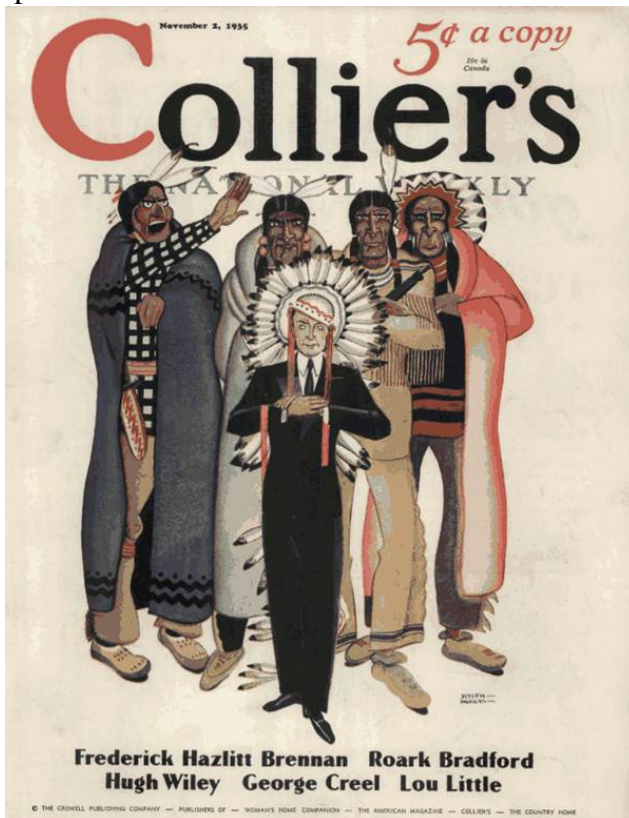
“Sewed into the lining of the left sleeve of your coat.” James Lee's exploring fingers stopped. “I was off a bit in that guess. Permit me to put your knife to a legitimate use.”

When the missing manuscript had been ripped out of its hiding place, “There is one thing you may still do at this late moment to regain the Middle Pathway,” James Lee suggested to the cringing Japanese. “You poisoned Professor Markham. You found the cyanide crystals in his photographic laboratory. You substituted a hydrocyanic solution for the harmless prescription from Ehrmann's Pharmacy. You poisoned him! You killed him! Confess your guilt!”

Haruki bowed his head. “Yes,” he whispered, “I killed him.”

James Lee turned to Harvey Ainsworth. “That seems to close the case,” he said. He glanced down at Haruki. “It is regrettable that this poor fool should have confused the precious Wu Wang

manuscript with common treasures of earth."



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Collier's, February 15 1936

Mr. Wong:

NO WITNESSES

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

illustrated by Irving Nurick

No Witnesses. A Holiday for Detective James Lee.

James Lee, undercover man, takes a little vacation and finds it decidedly more exciting than yours will be—we trust

ON A FLYING visit to San Francisco, the chief took time out to compliment James Lee on the capture of the Palmer narcotic crew.

"We are all proud of you," the chief said. "You had a close call when Palmer opened up on you with his gun."

James Lee smiled. "Three shots at ten feet. Two of them tore the lining out of my coat under the left arm."

"Your luck is still holding. May I have a cigarette?"

James Lee extended a package of cigarettes. The chief noted a faint tremor in the hand that held the cigarettes. "You need a holiday," he said. "Let Franklin take care of the office for a couple of weeks. Get out into the desert or the mountains."

"I don't need a holiday."

"Your nerves need a holiday. Orders are orders. Make your application for thirty days and I'll okay it."

In his smile of acceptance James Lee showed a quick eagerness for the rest from duty that his chief had given him. His mind turned forthwith to contemplation of the High Sierra. "I guess I will go up to Sky Ridge for a couple of weeks."

The chief nodded. "Fair enough; I wish I could go with you.

After dinner, why don't you drive up? Only two hundred miles, isn't it?"

"That sounds pleasant. I'll be at Sky Ridge an hour after midnight."

On schedule, in the Ridge House at one o'clock in the morning, greeting Chester Greeley, the proprietor of the place, "I am here under cover," James Lee said. "I want a rest. If you don't mind we will avoid what happened last time when you introduced me as a Department man."

The affable Chester Greeley smiled. "Fair enough. I understand. No more bedtime stories for the trippers. No more request performances by the distinguished federal operative."

"Thank you. Is Old Hong Yet still with you?"

"He's still king of the kitchen. He will be glad to see you."

At breakfast next morning, to his Chinese friend, Hong Yet, who ruled the Ridge House kitchen, "I am here to eat, and to sleep, and to rest," James Lee explained.

"I will be responsible for one of your three desires," the old cook promised. "For your dinner tonight would you like six trout fresh from the icy water of Canyon Creek?"

"Twelve would please me even more."

"Trust me. Your hunger will be satisfied."

That evening at dinner the dining room of the Ridge House was filled, due to an influx of transient trippers bound for a midnight dance in a town fifty miles farther along the highway. When James Lee came into the dining room, the proprietor of the Ridge House introduced another guest. "I am sorry that we are so crowded tonight," Chester Greeley explained. "This is Mr. Archer Long of Kansas City. If you gentlemen will share one of those small tables together, I will see that young Harper takes care of you right away."

James Lee bowed. "Very happy to meet you, Mr. Long."

"Mr. Long is going to be with us for a month," Greeley explained. "He comes from Kansas City."

Shaking hands with James Lee, "What business are you in, Mr.

Lee?" Archer Long asked.

"I am interested in two or three enterprises in San Francisco," James Lee said, veiling the truth with a plausible veneer of deceit.

"Business in Chinatown?"

Here the truth would serve. "Yes," James Lee answered; "a lot of my business is in Chinatown."

"I have a brass foundry in K. C," Archer Long offered. "Started her on a shoestring twenty years ago and now she keeps me in expense money, at least. Haven't laid off a man in the last ten years."

"You are very fortunate."

Archer Long smiled. "I get the business—lots of railroad business. You been out here long?"

"I have lived in California most of my life."

"This here country looks mighty good to me. The more I see of it the better I like it. I have a mighty good mind to settle down right here in the mountains and spend the rest of my days loafing and hunting and fishing."

WITHIN forty-eight hours after Archer Long's arrival in Sky Ridge, the spell of the California gold country had claimed him. To the loafing crew of old-timers on the front porch of Ed Hall's saloon, in the little mining town half a mile from the Ridge House, "Gentlemen, I'm stuck on this country," Mr. Long announced after he had enjoyed his second glass of beer. "I am going to buy me a place right here in this town and spend the rest of my days hunting and fishing and loafing around with you boys."

After a moment's silence, "They ain't no good places fer sale any more," Ed Hall declared. "Only land I know of close around here that you might get is the Levi Minch property. His father left him the place, you know. He's kind of sentimental and I don't know whether he will sell out or not."

"Levi don't need no money," one of the gang suggested.

"He likes money just the same," another member countered. "Levi has been a regular tightwad ever since he hit that rich placer ground near Little York."

ARCHER LONG touched a match to a middle-class ten-cent cigar. “What would it take to buy the Minch place?” he asked.

Ed Hall munched on a chew of fine cut, and then, “I have seen the time when Levi would sell the whole twenty acres for five hundred dollars, but I tell you what to do, Mr. Long. You get ahold of two thousand dollars in small-size greenbacks. Go down and see Levi and slap the money down on the table in front of him and see what happens. It's worth trying.”

“I'll take your advice; I'll try it. Right now I think I will amble up and have a look at the place.”

Absorbed in contemplating the delights of a peaceful existence on the Levi Minch place, Mr. Long detoured to his left en route to the Ridge House, pacing slowly up the main street of Sky Ridge until he came to the Minch property. He stood a while looking out across the interesting terrain, noting with unrealized pleasure the play of light and shadows that painted and darkened the rocks and pines of his desired domain.

“She's perfect,” he said half aloud, so that his own ears might share the happy mood that filled his heart. The mood endured through the long mile of his route to Ridge House, and at supper time, after speaking pleasantly to James Lee, who sat across the table from him, “It don't make any difference what you bring me for my supper,” he said to young Gerald Harper. “Boy, this mountain air makes me so hungry I could eat the roast ribs of a cast-iron mule.”

“I'll get you a nice, tender steak, Mr. Long. If old Hong Yet turns out a tough one I'll chase him over the bluff.”

“I'll leave it to you, son,” Mr. Long said with a royal gesture. “Anything goes, and the more the better. I'm hungry like a wolf.”

WHEN the waiter had left them, “That's a mighty fine boy, Mr. Lee,” Archer Long declared. “He tells me he is working his way through college. I'll bet he makes a million dollars before he is through.”

James Lee nodded. “No doubt,” he agreed. “After all, nothing

takes the place of hard work. He seems to be an excellent young man."

At the moment in the kitchen of the Ridge House the excellent young man faced old Hong Yet. "Cut loose with one of those nice tenderloin steaks for Mr. Long," he ordered. "Fry it in butter; he wants it rare."

"I ketchum. How much money he give you?"

"Listen, yau Oriental pirate, I'll split the dough with you when I get it. Hurry up with a good tender steak and all the trimmings."

James Lee had finished his dinner and had left the table before the tender steak was brought on. It tasted well, and Mr. Long complimented young Gerald Harper and old Hong Yet on their good work.

He handed the young man a silver dollar. "Son, buy yourself a house with this," he said.

"Thank you, Mr. Long."

Hungry for conversation, "You going to have money enough to take you through the next term?" Archer Long asked.

"Looks like I'm all set. I've got enough for my tuition and I can take on the battle of board and room when it comes along."

"You told me you was studying to be a mining engineer."

"Yes, sir. That's what I want to be."

"Get me a piece of pie and I'll make a proposition to you when you get back here."

Following the pie came Mr. Long's proposition: "Tomorrow morning right after breakfast I want you to drive me down to Colburn. I want to get me some money at the bank. It'll take me about thirty seconds."

"Yes, sir; I'll have the car gassed and ready."

Archer Long's estimate of the time he would require in the Colburn bank was in error by more than seven minutes, but presently, with a thick bundle made up of one hundred twenty-dollar bills parked in his right hip pocket, he left the bank and returned to where young Gerald Harper waited for him in the car.

“I cleaned that up mighty quick,” he said to Harper. “They dug up two thousand dollars for me in twenty-dollar bills without a struggle.... We might as well head back to Sky Ridge. I'm gittin' hungry for my lunch already.”

Three hours after he had finished his lunch Archer Long left the Ridge House and walked to Ed Hall's saloon in Sky Ridge. Quietly, across the bar, after his second gulp of cold beer, “I'm going to walk down to Minch's place and play my ace like you advised,” he confided to Ed Hall. “I went down to the bank this morning and got two thousand bucks in twenties. I'm going to slap 'em down in front of Minch and see what happens.”

“My heart is heavy with a problem for whose solution I seek your aid,” he said

“He didn’t leave that pack of twenty-dollar bills in the coat, did he?” the sheriff asked Levi Minch abruptly

AT NINE o'clock, after serving coffee to the last supper guest in the dining room of the Ridge House, Gerald Harper walked back to the kitchen and faced old Hong Yet.

“Mr. Long hasn't showed up,” he said. “Those trout that you're saving for him aren't going to get any better in the ice chest. How about cooking them for my supper?”

“You supper!” Hong Yet spluttered. “What name you! Boss he say keep fishee for Mis' Long. I keep him.”

“Listen, you flathead. Mr. Long isn't going to fall for any antique fish. Go on and cook 'em and we'll split 'em fifty-fifty.”

Old Hong Yet reached dramatically for a meat cleaver. “You talkee-talkee lilly bit more I split you fitty-fitty so big you die.”

Falling back on the vernacular, scowling at his opponent, “Oh, yeah? You and who else?” Gerald Harper retorted. “Listen, you slant-eyed....”

Interrupting the battle at this point, Chester Greeley, proprietor of the Ridge House, appeared in the doorway of the kitchen. “What's going on here?”

“I was just trying to get Hong to cook those trout for me that he is saving for old man Long.”

“Never mind about those trout. Save 'em for Mr. Long's breakfast. Didn't he show up for supper?”

“He hasn't showed up yet.”

“Probably eating supper with some of his new friends over in Sky Ridge. Keep the trout for his breakfast.”

Early the following morning the trout theme, lingering in Chester Greeley's mind, impelled him to inquire about Archer Long. “Mr. Long show up for his trout?” he asked, sampling the coffee that Gerald Harper had served.

“Not yet, Mr. Greeley.”

“That's funny. Slip over to his cabin and see if he's asleep. He's always up before I am.”

Three minutes later, returning from his inspection trip, “He isn't in his cabin,” Gerald Harper reported. “He didn't sleep in his bed.”

Chester Greeley frowned. “I wonder where he spent the night. That's the first time the old boy has stayed out all night.”

In Sky Ridge, an hour later, Chester Greeley stopped at the post office and then made his way down to Ed Hall's saloon. “Morning, Ed,” he said gravely, “how are you feeling?”

“Okay and then some. How's everything?”

“Fair enough.... You haven't seen anything of Mr. Long, have you?”

“He was here yesterday afternoon. That's the last I seen of him. Didn't he show up at your place?”

“He wasn't there for supper and he didn't sleep in his cabin last night. You don't suppose he was walking around and broke his leg or anything?”

“It ain't likely. All he had to do was yell loud and somebody would hear him.”

“Well, I'll be going along. Ask the boys when they drift in if any of them know about Mr. Long.”

“I'll look around,” Ed Hall promised.

After he had swept out his establishment and sprinkled the rough floor Ed Hall turned his joint over to the first native that showed up and headed for Levi Minch's ranch.

Answering Ed Hall's first direct question, “Long come in here early yesterday evening,” Levi Minch answered. “He stayed about half an hour.”

“What did he talk about mostly?”

Levi Minch hesitated for a moment and then, “Well, mostly he talked about wantin' to buy this place. He was ready to pay cash.”

Ed Hall grunted. “What made you think he could pay cash?”

Levi Minch's eyes glittered for a moment. “The main reason was that he had the cash with him—two thousand dollars.”

Ed Hall, in feigned surprise, permitted a startled look to occupy his rugged countenance. “You mean that feller showed you two thousand dollars all in a bunch?”

Levi Minch nodded. “Yep. Two thousand dollars all in twenty-dollar bills.”

“I always knowed you was crazy. You mean you let that much money get away when it was right in front of you?”

“Well, doggone it—I wanted time to think things over. I told him I'd let him know today.”

WHEN Ed Hall had returned to his haven he found six of the regular rest crew lounging on the front porch. “You fellers come in

here," he said.

When the seven men were in the barroom, "Lock that front door," the proprietor ordered. Then point by point he set forth the reasons for his suspicion that Levi Minch might have murdered Archer Long. "That's the whole case in a nutshell," he concluded. "You know how Levi is about money."

"The only thing to do is to call up the sheriff. That's the best way. Tell him to come up here and look Levi over."

Ed Hall nodded, "I'll do it. I'll telephone Joe right now."

Searching Levi Minch's cabin, Joe Banfield, the sheriff of the county, and one of his skillful deputies found Archer Long's tobacco pouch and a leather coat that had belonged to the missing man.

"He gave me that pouch for a present," Levi protested.

"How about the leather coat?"

"He left it here because he was sweatin' and didn't want to carry it. He was comin' back for it."

"He didn't leave that pack of twenty-dollar bills in that coat, did he?" the sheriff asked abruptly.

"What twenty-dollar bills?" Levi Minch gulped.

"Levi, you know damn' well what twenty-dollar bills I mean. You seen 'em, didn't you?"

"I never saw...." Levi Minch began; then, remembering his statement to Ed Hall, "Yes, I saw the money," he said.

After a moment, "Levi, I got to take you with me," the sheriff said quietly.

SEARCHING for Archer Long's body, half of the males of Sky Ridge and various guests and employees from the Ridge House spread out over the country lying around the Minch ranch.

Leading one of the searching parties, Chester Greeley, with young Gerald Harper, James Lee and four other guests from the inn, ranged southward from Levi Minch's cabin. Their search, fruitless up to that time, concentrated on a definite objective after a suggestion offered by young Gerald Harper.

“There's a prospect hole half a mile the other side of Minch's cabin—deep enough to hide a hundred murdered men,” he said. “Let's try it.”

Chester Greeley swung around. “Come on, men! That sounds mighty smart to me. Let's go.”

Within the hour the crumpled body of Archer Long was found at the bottom of the forty-foot prospect hole half a mile north of Levi Minch's cabin. He had been killed with a blow back of his right ear that had fractured his skull.

“He might have fallen into the shaft,” James Lee said. “I can't see much conclusive evidence of murder.”

“If his skull was fractured falling down this shaft there'd be plenty of blood spilled around,” Gerald Harper contradicted.

“That cinches the case against Minch,” Chester Greeley exclaimed. “If it had been an accident he'd still have them twenty-dollar bills on him. A man don't rob himself falling down a prospect hole.” Then to Young Harper, “Boy, one man's luck is another man's poison. If they convict Minch on what you figured out you got a thousand dollars coming to you—standing reward in this country for every convicted murderer.”

“It's mighty sad money,” Gerald Harper answered, “but I can use it. It'll pay my way through school.”

AT THE Ridge House, returning with the sad news of Archer Long's death, Chester Greeley encountered his cook. “What you likee I do with Mis' Long fishee?” Hong Yet asked. “I keep him?”

“Eat 'em, throw 'em away, do anything you want with them! Mr. Long will never come back. He's dead. Somebody killed him.”

“Too bad. Mis' Long number one good man. Who kill him?”

“Levi Minch killed him. He was over at Minch's place. Mr. Long had a lot of money on him. Next thing we find is his body. No money. Somebody robbed him.”

Hong Yet grunted. “You talkee like you crazy. Levi Minchee him number one good man. He never kill eprybody.”

“Stop talking to yourself.” Chester Greeley started out of Hong

Yet's kitchen. “Stop talking and get to work.”

Hong Yet got to work, but for the ensuing hour for varying brief intervals he talked to himself in Cantonese.

Interrupting the soliloquy when it had dwindled to an occasional whispered phrase of criticism for Levi Minch's accusers, young Gerald Harper walked into the kitchen. “I want to use your big tub, China boy,” he said. “All right with you?”

“Why you allee time likee big tub? Mo' better you ketchum lilly dishpan.”

“I want to wash my corduroys. I'm going back to school next week and I got 'em gummed up with tarweed last week. How about it?”

“You likee big tub you take him.”

“Okay, slant-eye.”

For a little while after loaning his pet washtub, Hong Yet grumbled to himself at the indignity of lending this part of his personal equipment for laundry purposes and then, halting midway of a cackling sentence, he looked vacantly into space for five seconds. Forthwith, at a quick pace, he walked to his little room at the end of the kitchen. There he found two opium pills. He swallowed these and, his nerves steadying under the effect of the timely blessing, he sought his countryman, James Lee.

Following appropriate salutations, “My heart is heavy with a problem for whose solution I seek your aid,” he said. He continued for three minutes with fluent phrases, setting forth the problem. “The eyes of the blind need no ointment.”

“You are of clear perception,” James Lee said. “Wisdom adorns your words. I will see if we can solve this puzzle. Let me have the pieces of burned pages from the book.”

TWENTY minutes later, in the narrow telephone booth of the pay station in Sky Ridge, James Lee took a charred fragment of paper out of his pocketbook. He called the State Library in Sacramento. Presently to one of the librarians, “My problem is this,” he said. “I have a scrap of a page from a burned book. I want to discover the name of the book. In the first line at the top of the page

are the words: 'accumulated in cavities'. The rest of the fragment is rather obscure except two or three lines farther down in italics the text reads: 'Amalgam. See Page 130'. I want to identify that page. Probably a book on mineralogy. I'll telephone you again in an hour. I'm very anxious to discover the title of the book from which the burned page was taken."

At five o'clock, following his second telephone call to the State Library, "I wonder if you can get young Gerald Harper rounded up for a brief and confidential conference," James Lee said to Chester Greeley.

"You want to see him in line of duty?"

"Yes, if you can arrange it."

"Go up to my bedroom. It's the second door to the left from the head of the stairs. I'll bring him right up. Do you want me to duck out and leave you together?"

"I very much want you to be present."

"I'll stick."

Facing Gerald Harper, "I'd like to get more of your theories about Archer Long's murder," James Lee said. "You have covered all the country around the Levi Minch property, haven't you?"

"Most of it, Mr. Lee. Prospecting."

"The Minch property wasn't included in one of the early Spanish grants, was it? Or do you know?"

"No, I don't know about the title. I don't think the Spanish grants came up into the gold country."

"Do you recall any mention of placer gold in the Spanish land grants in that book that James D. Dana wrote? What was it—Two Years Before the Mast?"

"That wasn't James D. Dana," Gerald Harper corrected. "He was a mineralogist. Two Years Before the Mast was written by another Dana. I think his name was Richard Henry Dana."

Very emphatically, "No, you're mistaken. James D. Dana wrote the book. I am sure of it," James Lee asserted.

"I'll bet you a million dollars you're wrong, Mr. Lee. I happen to

know that James D. Dana is the author of several books on mineralogy. I'm studying that subject at school. I know what I'm talking about."

"Listen, boy, I've got seven or eight different editions of Two Years Before the Mast," James Lee explained. "I happen to know that book. I'll take your million-dollar bet. By any chance have you a copy of your Mr. James D. Dana's Mineralogy?"

"Of course, I..." At this Gerald Harped stopped.

"Go ahead. What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say that..."

"You were going to say that you had a copy of James D. Dana's Mineralogy. Is that it?"

Hesitating and then very slowly, "That's what makes me sure—I know the book perfectly well. I've studied it for three years. I've got a copy...."

"Where have you got a copy?" James Lee asked quietly.

"I've got a copy stored with my books down at school."

"What you've got at school proves nothing." Coldly then and abruptly, "By any chance would you have concealed one hundred twenty-dollar bills in your mutilated copy of Dana's Mineralogy?"

Gerald Harper's face crimsoned. He scowled at James Lee and then, in a voice that dripped with venom, "I can make trouble for you if you're not mighty careful, Mr. Lee. That accusation ..."

"Perhaps I have reason to accuse you," James Lee suggested. "The tarweed on your corduroys.... Why were you in such haste to borrow old Hong Yet's tub? Bloodstains, by any chance?"

Before Gerald Harper could answer, "The tarweed detail is interesting," James Lee continued. "Strangely enough, the only patch of tarweed within three miles of here lies in that area where we found Archer Long's body. Old Hong Yet smelled the odor of tarweed on your corduroys yesterday. The pungent aroma of tarweed disappears in twenty-four hours."

Gerald Harper scowled.

"What of it? That means nothing."

James Lee smiled thinly. “Why did you burn seventy or eighty pages of Dana's Mineralogy? Let me return to my original question. By any chance did you conceal Archer Long's money in your hollowed-out copy of that book after you killed him?”

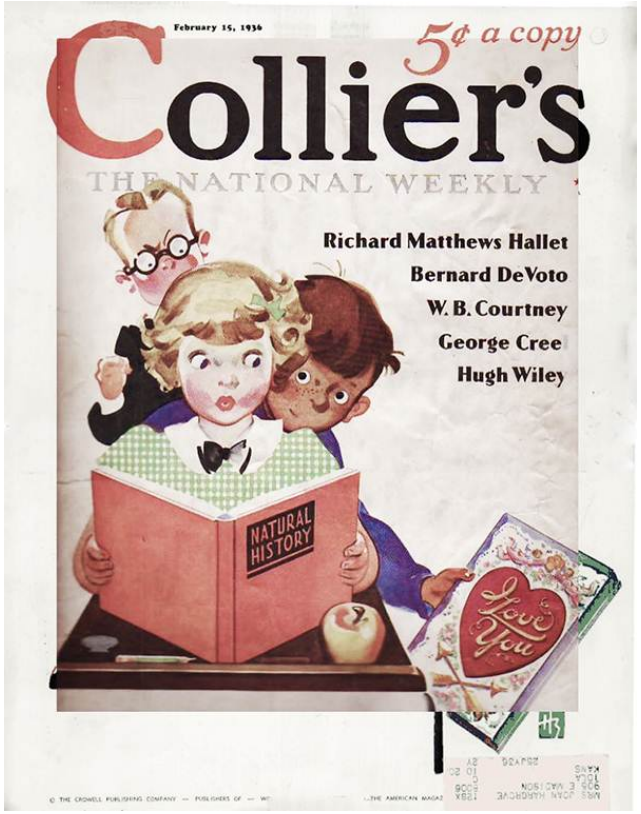
In a moment, speaking slowly, “What if I have Mr. Long's money?” Gerald Harper grated. “It proves nothing. He might have given it to me. I didn't kill him.”

JAMES LEE nodded wearily. Then his eyes seemed to narrow to flaming points of green light. “How about a couple of witnesses?” he suggested. “What if two of the old-timers of Sky Ridge prospecting in the tarweed country near Minch's cabin watched you trailing Archer Long? What if they saw you kill him? Shall I bring them in?”

The young man's face turned gray. He took one deep breath. “I killed him,” he admitted. “I didn't know anyone saw me do it.”

James Lee lighted a cigarette. “No one saw you kill him,” he said. “I merely suggested that there might have been witnesses.” He turned to the proprietor of the Ridge House. “Please telephone the sheriff that we have Archer Long's murderer,” he directed.

Again to Gerald Harper, “You made two mistakes,” James Lee explained. “First of all, you overlooked Hong Yet's selfish interest in his pet washtub. Your second mistake was trying to burn the pages cut out of Dana's book in a trash fire. Trifling mistakes, I admit, but I am afraid you lose. I am sorry that you must pay with your life for having left the Middle Pathway. In China they say that a grain of sand can hide a mountain, and that only a dead snake is straight.”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NATURAL HISTORY
I Love You

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Collier's, September 5, 1936

Mr. Wong:

SEVEN OF SPADES

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

illustrated by Irving Nurick

Poker game, James Lee dealing. Page 10

James Lee, government man, follows a gangster's trail to another strange and thrilling adventure

OVER Arizona, eighty miles east of the California line, the pilot of the Silver Arrow came back into the cabin of the plane with a message for James Lee. James Lee read the message:

BANCROFT ON DUTCH FLINT CASE MURDERED STOP YOUR ORDERS OMAHA CANCELLED STOP CALL ME LONG DISTANCE FROM STANTON

The message was signed by the chief of the Bureau of Investigation. James Lee looked up at the pilot of the Silver Arrow. "You'll set me down at Stanton?"

The pilot nodded. "I'll land you there in thirty minutes, Mr. Lee.... Wasn't Bancroft the young fellow who rode out with me about a month ago? Slim and red-headed? Mining engineer?"—

"You have a good memory."

"Was he a G-man?"

James Lee frowned. "Mr. Bancroft was a mining engineer.... Please remember that this message from the Department is strictly confidential."

The pilot nodded. "I get you. Good luck. I'll set her down at Stanton for you in less than half an hour."

From Washington, speaking to James Lee at Stanton over long distance, "Bancroft was undercover at Redstone," the chief said.

"Ranger. Park service. Lived in a cabin with another ranger by the name of Al Blake. Sheriff Deane figures that Blake is the killer. He has him jailed at Stanton."

"What's the latest you have on Dutch Flint?"

"We think he's hiding north of Redstone."

"You're sending me the file on the case?"

"It's on a westbound plane right now. If you get a line on Flint you'd better have some of your men over from Los Angeles and San Francisco."

"What about Blake?"

"Bancroft figured he was a good egg.... Have a talk with Sheriff Deane right away and hop to it. That's all—and good luck."

AFTER he had introduced himself to Sheriff Deane, "I guess you don't need any help on this case, Sheriff," James Lee began, "but Frank Bancroft was a pal of mine in the service. We worked together for seven or eight years and I have a personal interest in putting the man who killed him on the spot."

"I'm mighty glad to have you on the job, Mr. Lee. I guess there ain't much work for you to do. We've got the deadwood on Al Blake." The sheriff scowled. "If I ain't mistaken I'll get a confession out of him by six o'clock tonight."

"I'd like to talk to him."

"Go ahead. Help yourself."

James Lee was silent for a moment and then, "Sheriff, do you remember the details of Dutch Flint's record?"

"Dutch Flint—I can't say that I do. A big-time gangster, wasn't he?"

"He still is. Dutch Flint and his mob blasted a few country banks in Kansas and Missouri for a while and then they got into the big money on a kidnapping case. You remember the Matson snatching, don't you?"

“I'm kinda cloudy on that. Matson was a young feller?”

“Matson was thirty years old. They killed him. The second set of headlines covered the Melville girl kidnapping. They killed her. That was a year ago. We captured three of the gang but Dutch Flint got away.... Would you say offhand, Sheriff, that Al Blake might be one of Dutch Flint's new outfit?”

“No! Al Blake ain't nuthin' but a hot-headed young ranger. He's been up at Redstone there for six or eight months. He's been in the park service for the last ten years.”

“WHAT was his motive in killing Bancroft?”

“The best motive in the world. Jealousy.”

“Jealousy—do you mean that there's a woman in the case?”

“No. Professional jealousy. Bancroft come in with sixty dollars a month more on his pay check than Blake got. Blake was headed for promotion until Bancroft showed up.”

“Just plain professional jealousy—and a hot temper.”

The sheriff nodded. “That's it exactly.”

“I'll have a talk with Blake.”

To the deputy sheriff who escorted him to Al Blake's cell, “Let me in the cell and then leave us,” James Lee directed. Smiling, “You never can make 'em talk in front of witnesses.”

The deputy understood. “I get you, Mr. Lee,” he said. “Here he is.”

Facing Al Blake, “I've come down to talk to you about my friend Frank Bancroft. I'm an operative for the Bureau of Investigation,” the Chinese detective explained, introducing himself. “My name is James Lee.”

Blake held out his hand. “I'm what's left of Al Blake, Mr. Lee. This thing has got me.”

James Lee looked straight at the prisoner. “Did you kill Frank Bancroft?”

“No! Frank was the swellest guy I ever knew. All I can say

is....”

Interrupting the prisoner, “How did Frank like his job?”

“Offhand, I'd say he was stuck on his job. He loved the country, Mr. Lee. We got along fine. One of the swellest partners in the world:”

“What time did you get back to the cabin—when you found Frank's body?”

“Close to suppertime—around six o'clock.”

“What did you do when you walked into the cabin?”

“I saw Frank lying on the floor. I felt his heart ... he was dead.”

“And then?”

“I dragged him over to his bunk, Mr. Lee, and lifted him up into it.”

“Then what?”

“Then I went out and got a bucket of water and sloshed it on the floor to wash the blood away. It was right in the middle of the floor. When I came back with the water I saw that the staple on the door that we padlock the cabin with was busted.”

“What did you do after you cleaned up the blood on the floor?”

“I didn't clean it up—I just heaved a bucket of water on it to wash it down through the cracks in the floor. The floor is rough boards with cracks half an inch wide. I went over to the telephone and called up the operator at Crystal and told him to get hold of Sheriff Deane. I told him to send somebody over from Crystal. It's only fifteen miles.”

“How long did it take the sheriff to get to Redstone?”

“He didn't come. One of his deputies came over from Crystal and pinched me. I was plenty surprised and plenty sore.”

James Lee nodded.. “No doubt. What time were you arrested?”

“I didn't keep any track of the time after I found Frank's body, but I must have been arrested somewhere around seven o'clock

that evening. They got me into jail here at Stanton before midnight."

"Who arrested you?"

"Bill Putnam. He's been one of Deane's deputies for three or four years."

"Who is Bill Putnam?"

"He runs a pool hall here in Stanton; sort of a cigar store and pool hall. I've been in it half a dozen times. There's generally a poker game running in the back end of the joint."

He began a close inspection of the bottle with a lens. "We've hit pay dirt," he announced

"Keep your fins up in the air!" Dutch Flint ordered harshly. "Carver, frisk him!"

"WHAT do you suppose Putnam was doing in Crystal?"

"He ranges around quite a lot. He's been gambling in prospect holes and gold mines and things like that on the side ever since he landed here."

"How long has he been in Stanton?"

“As near as I remember from what I heard he came here six or eight years ago. There was some sort of a story about some trouble he got into once in Reno. I never heard the straight of it. There was one more thing, Mr. Lee—when I walked into the cabin and saw Frank's body lying there—that is, when I went over to telephone—I remember the little desk we used was all mussed up.”

“You mean somebody had gone through it?”

“Yes, sir, that's the way it looked.”

“Where is this pool hall that Mr. Putnam runs?”

“It's a couple of blocks down the street from the courthouse.”

“I'll have a talk with him. I'll see you later in the day,” James Lee said.

The trace of a smile quivered in the corners of Al Blake's mouth. “I'll wait here for you,” he said.

Impulsively James Lee held out his hand to the prisoner. “Keep your chin up.”

THE proprietor of the Pastime Club, Bill Putnam, was seated at a little desk against the back wall of the poolroom when James Lee entered the place. Three pool tables filled the central space of the long room. In the first apartment back of the poolroom a poker game was in progress; save for the proprietor, the large central room was empty.

Entering the place, “I'm looking for Mr. Putnam,” James Lee said.

“My name is Putnam. What can I do for you?”

“My name is Lee, Bureau of Investigation. I want to talk to you about the Bancroft murder.”

“Go ahead and talk. Have they lynched Al Blake yet?”

“Do you think Blake killed Bancroft?”

“It's a cinch.”

“What makes you think so?”

“I'll spring my evidence in a trial court, unless Blake is strung up before then.”

“You don't seem to be in a very pleasant humor this morning, Mr. Putnam.”

“Why the hell should I be in a pleasant humor? The sheriff and I and the local courts can take care of our troubles without any of you smart boys from the outside butting into the game.”

James Lee asked quietly, “Has anyone ever suggested to you that your deputy's badge isn't large enough to cover your Reno record?”

Bill Putnam got to his feet. “What do you mean?”

James Lee risked a small bet on Putnam's evident agitation at the mention of the Reno record. “I mean that some of the department's files are never closed.... I'd like to talk to you about the Bancroft murder if you don't mind. I'm friendly. How about it?”

Bill Putnam scowled. “Go ahead. What do you want to know?”

“Tell the story.”

“There isn't much story. I was up in Crystal on business.

Sheriff Deane telephoned me that Bancroft had been murdered. I drove over to the cabin at Redstone and arrested Al Blake. Bancroft was dead. Blake had some blood on him. I covered Blake with my gun and got the handcuffs on him and brought him in. That was all there was to it.”

“Did you bring Bancroft's body with you?”

“I was driving a little roadster. Ben Carver was in Crystal with a light truck. I told him to follow me over to Redstone and after I pinched Blake I told Carver to haul Bancroft's body down here to Stanton and turn it over to the coroner.”

“Who is Carver?” James Lee asked.

“He runs a saddlery store up the street here. He sells Indian jewelry and rugs and things like that as a side line.”

“Did you examine the cabin at Redstone for any evidence of the murder?”

“Evidence hell! The man was lying there dead! Nobody but Blake had been there with him. What better evidence do you want?”

REALIZING the futility of the conversation, Lee nodded in feigned agreement.

“I guess you're right,” he said. “Thanks. Where did you say Carver's place was?”

“Half a block up the street—west.”

“Thank you, Mr. Putnam.... There is one other thing. Going over to the cabin at Redstone from Crystal, how far behind you was Ben Carver?”

“I didn't pay any attention to that. He was pretty close, I guess, till we got almost to Redstone. Then he dropped behind so that if there was any shooting I could take care of things single-handed.”

“Is the road from Crystal to Redstone dusty?”

“It's solid rock most of the way. Good, clean rock. The wind blows too strong most of the time to let any dust lay around.”

“Did you take Blake back to Crystal after you captured him?”

“No; I brought him straight south to Stanton. There's a sort of a side road from Redstone to Horn Spring where it hits the main road from Stanton to Crystal, about eighty miles up the line.”

“And Carver brought Bancroft's body to Stanton over the same road?”

“Yep. He followed right behind me all the way.”

“Thank you, Mr. Putnam. I'll see you again before I leave.”

Putnam scowled. “So long,” he said.

Marching down the long aisle of Ben Carver's pungent saddlery shop after a cracked bell had clanked in announcement of his entrance, James Lee found the proprietor of the place midway of the long building. Carver, engaged at the moment in

opening a consignment of Navaho jewelry from a Connecticut manufacturer, looked up over his left shoulder.

"What can I do for you?" he said, smiling thinly at James Lee.

"I'd like to talk to you about Frank Bancroft's murder."

Carver frowned. "Why do you want to talk to me about that mess? You working for Al Blake?"'

"I'm working for the Department of Justice. Do you think Blake killed Bancroft?"

"Sure he did! There was nobody else in the cabin when me and Putnam got there."

"What motive did Blake have for killing Bancroft?"

"How the hell do I know why he killed him? Probably they were both nuts about the same girl.... You don't mind if I ask you a question or two, do you?"

James Lee nodded. "Go ahead."

"In the first place, where do you cut into this game? How does Bancroft rate a G-man at his inquest?"

"What else do you want to know?"

CARVER picked up a turquoise ring that lay on the table in front of him. He looked at the ring for a moment and then, "Just to cut this short, how would you like to get the hell out of my place right now?" he asked.

James Lee reached for a cigarette and lighted it. "I wouldn't mind—but before I go I'd like *to* ask you two more questions."

The speaker took a long, deep drag at his cigarette and gazed at the ceiling for a moment. Then through a curling cloud of smoke, "Do you think you could stand up in court and clear yourself of an indictment for murder in case the district attorney got—troublesome?"

Ben Carver snorted. "Nuts to you! I'll come back with a question: Do you think you can live through the night?"

James Lee nodded. "Yes," he said, "I think I can!... I'll be at

the Eagle Hotel tonight in case you want to make any suggestions about locating Bancroft's murderer."

Leaving the Carver establishment, James Lee walked directly to the sheriff's office in the courthouse.

To Sheriff Deane, "I want to take Blake up to Redstone with me tomorrow morning," he said. "I want you to release him into my custody tomorrow."

Joe Deane grunted. "How do I know that you'll get him back here?" he countered. "How do I know somebody won't take him off your hands and hang him?"

"I'll be responsible for the man," James Lee said coldly. "One more favor, Sheriff, if you don't mind. Have one of your men meet the night plane from the East. The Department is sending out some records that I need on this case."

The sheriff nodded. "Sure you trust us messenger boys, Mr. Lee?"

With some bitterness, "I'd trust you as messenger boys. If you really want to do me an important favor you might post a man or two around the Eagle Hotel tonight to see that I live till morning."

"You turning yellow?"

"Put it that way if you wish to."

An hour after sundown that night a bullet punctured a neat hole in the glass of a bedroom window in the Eagle Hotel. The bullet, whining on its futile way at short range, followed a trajectory that lay an inch above James Lee's left shoulder and an inch to the left of his neck.

One second thereafter James Lee's silhouette dropped from the lighted shade that veiled the window of his room.

At morning, after he had signed the document that gave him custody of Al Blake, looking straight at Sheriff Deane, "I'm grateful to you for letting one of your deputies ride herd on me last night. They almost got me."

"What do you mean—somebody shoot at you last night?"

“Let's say he shot in my general direction. If my shadow hadn't been six or eight inches taller than I happen to be, the Bancroft murder case would have been complicated with another corpse. I dug the bullet out of the wall of a bedroom three doors away from my room. Here it is.”

Sheriff Deane looked mildly annoyed. “Doggone it, Mr. Lee, that's an awful crazy story to tell me this early after breakfast.” He looked down at the battered bullet in the palm of his right hand. “I can't imagine who might have took a shot at you. What do you want me to do about it?”

“Nothing—but you might let me keep that bullet as a souvenir of your local hospitality.... Now if you'll turn Blake over to me I'll be on my way. I have a lot of work to do before sundown tonight.”

AT THE door of the cabin where Frank Bancroft had been killed Al Blake halted for a moment. “That's the busted staple, Mr. Lee,” he said. “See how this hasp is battered and bent?”

James Lee looked at the broken fastening of the door. “What about the lock? Was it found?”

“It was just a cheap little padlock. It broke before either the hasp or the staple gave way. I didn't see it when I first looked. Whoever broke into the place probably threw it away.”

“We'll have a look for it after a while. Let's go inside.... Is that where you cleaned up the blood on the floor?”

Blake nodded solemnly.

JAMES LEE surveyed the scene for a moment. Then, quickly, “Was that champagne bottle that you use for a candlestick tipped over on the desk the last time you saw it?”

“I don't remember.”

Blake walked toward his desk.

“Don't touch that bottle. Wait a moment.... Did you or Bancroft happen to have any talcum powder in your shaving

outfit?"

"Frank had some."

"Get it for me."

A moment later, on the dark green surface of the overturned bottle on the desk, James Lee sifted a cloud of talcum powder.. Then, "Hand me that shaving brush up there, will you?"

Very gently rotating the dark green bottle as he worked, James Lee brushed away the surplus powder on its surface.

When the whitened surface had grayed from its thinning dust of talc, he laid down the shaving brush. He began a close inspection of the surface of the bottle with an eight-power lens. After the lens had ranged across ten or fifteen square inches of the bottle's surface he halted suddenly and looked up at Al Blake.

"We've hit pay dirt!" James Lee said grimly. "Dutch Flint's fingerprints! The file on him came in last night from Washington. I memorized the high spots in his record. Here! Take this glass and look at that V-shaped scar that ties up the triangle and the loop. Index finger of Dutch Flint's right hand!"

"Dutch Flint? Where does that gangster come into this picture?"

"He probably comes in to save your life—and my reputation." Quickly then, "I've got a hunch!" James Lee reached in his pocket and pulled out the battered bullet that had been fired at him the night before. "I've overlooked a big bet!... Can I get Washington on this telephone?"

"She's probably still connected."

"What central?"

"Crystal. The switchboard is in the back end of the general store."

James Lee frowned. "I've got to take a chance." He took the receiver off the hook. He clicked the phone twice. "She's still alive." Then to the Crystal central, "Get me the chief of the Bureau of Investigation at Washington.... Official... Government rush."

"I'll call you back," central said.

"I'll wait on the line. Burn it through."

To the chief less than three minutes later, "James Lee talking. I got the file on the Matson, Melville, Continental man last night. Tell me something—quick.... Can you hear me?"

"Clear as a bell," the chief answered.

"Tell me this: What kind of a gun fired that bullet that killed young Matson?"

"Sanchez automatic, wasn't it? It's in the record."

"Sorry, Chief, it's not in the record. Are you sure about the Matson gun?"

"No, but I'm sure about the Melville gun. The Melville girl was killed with a Sanchez automatic. Nine millimeters. Five lands."

"All Sanchez automatics have five lands." James Lee tapped the desk impatiently with the bullet that had been fired at him the night before.

"What have you got?"

"This wire may leak. I can't tell you."

"Need any help?"

"Lots of it."

"I can have a dozen of your own men over from San Francisco in five hours."

"Too late. I need help but I've got to work alone. If anything happens to me cover the Sonora border south of Stanton. If you don't hear from me by eight o'clock tonight, our time, get busy."

"Okay. Standing by. Good luck."

James Lee hung up the receiver. He turned briskly to Al Blake.

"You heard that. Let's go!"

WHEN the roaring car had warmed up on the first five miles of the return journey to Stanton, "What's that hunch of yours, Mr.

Lee?" Al Blake asked again. "You think Flint is in Stanton?"

"I'm sure of it," James Lee said. "Flint and his gang pulled a couple of kidnappings last year—killed their victims each time. Young Matson was the first one. The Melville girl was the other—both killed with a shot from a Sanchez automatic."

"And that shot last night that was fired at you—a Sanchez pistol?"

Behind the wheel of the car, James Lee looked sideways for one second at Al Blake. "You're right," he said. "My hunch is that it was Dutch Flint who fired the shot last night, or someone using his gun.... Putting a few of the pieces together—if Flint was north of Redstone he'd have to come south to escape. The Department has the Utah country blocked. I figure he landed in Crystal and that Bancroft got a spot on him in that town. Flint probably learned that Bancroft was a government man. Flint broke into the cabin at Redstone and killed Bancroft. Bancroft probably came in while Flint was searching your desk for Bancroft's reports on him."

"And the next move?"

"Wait a minute. As soon as Flint killed Bancroft the town of Crystal got too hot for him. He moved out. He couldn't move north and there is nothing east or west.... He came south into Stanton—and his hideout is Bill Putnam's joint."

Silent thereafter for three minutes, "Mr. Lee, I've got a favor to ask of you," Al Blake said. "Just for luck, and because I thought a hell of a lot of Frank Bancroft, I'd like to sit in with you on this scrap."

James Lee reached around under his right armpit. With his left hand he hauled out a long blue-barreled .38. He handed the gun to Al Blake. "Here," he said, "take this—I've another one."

In Stanton at 6:15, directing the overture that preceded the first act of the big show, "I'm going to coast up within a hundred feet of Putnam's joint," James Lee began. "You cover the back end of the layout. I'm going in the front door. Don't let anyone get by you. Shoot first and challenge the corpse. I'll try to clean up in a

hurry."

Ten feet inside the front door of the Pastime Club, James Lee made a quick survey of the long poolroom. Two players were at the first table. Half a dozen idle spectators sat in the armchairs that ranged along the wall.

The proprietor of the Pastime Club, Bill Putnam, was not present.

James Lee faced one of the loungers. "Mr. Putnam around?"

"He's in the back room."

AT THE door of the poker-room James Lee decided to enter without knocking. He twisted the knob of the door. The door was locked. A voice from within challenged him. "Who's there?"

"This is James Lee."

A moment later the door opened narrowly. "Come in, Mr. Lee. We've been waiting for you."

James Lee walked into the poker-room. Seated at a round table near the far wall of the room were two men. Putnam waved his hand at the first one, "You know Ben Carver, I believe.... Let me introduce Dutch Flint."

In spite of every effort James Lee heard his own indrawn breath hiss through his clenched teeth. Then calmly, "I'm glad to see you, Dutch," he said. "I've been wanting to meet you for a long time." He held out his hand to Dutch Flint.

"Keep your fins up in the air!" Dutch Flint ordered harshly. "Carver, frisk him!... Your foot sort of slipped this time, didn't it, Chink? You figgered I'd be hidin' under the bed in the back room! Sit down. I've always wanted to play table stakes with a G-man!"

James Lee looked at the scattered cards on the top of the poker table. "No," he protested, "everything is working out fine. I'll be glad to play a little poker before I turn in for the night."

"Sit down," Dutch Flint repeated. "Make yourself at home. When you turn in for the night you'll turn in for the big sleep."

“Don't be rude to your playmates, Dutch. When are you leaving town?”

“I'll be pulling out in a couple of hours.”

“Fair enough. What are the chips worth?”

“Twenty bucks a stack.”

“I'm a little short of cash at the moment,” James Lee announced. “What's my gun worth?” He pointed to his long blue-barreled .38 that lay on the table at Dutch Flint's right hand.

“I'm banking,” Putnam cut in. “I can't allow you anything on the gun. It belongs to Dutch—finders keepers, you know, wise guy.”

“Fair enough. Give me a couple of stacks. Anything wild?”

“Nothing wild in this game but a G-man,” Ben Carver answered. “We're all tame enough.”

The lower rim of the conical green-glass lamp shade hanging twelve inches above the center of the table lay on a level with Dutch Flint's upper lip. James Lee saw Flint's mouth working under the stress of hate. “Dutch is getting wild,” he said. “Maybe he's anxious about something. Deal the cards.”

“You deal the cards, G-man. You win the deal.”

James Lee reached for a new deck that lay at his left and broke the seals on it. “Not that I don't trust you gentlemen,” he said, “but I like to train my own cards. I'm looking for aces.... Dutch, some place in your hand tonight you're going to find the seven of spades. You know what that card means.”

“I ain't never lost yet, wise guy. It's your turn to lose tonight.”

“Listen, Dutch—I can't lose! I can't lose and you can't win! The cards are stacked against you seven ways from the jack. Frank Bancroft is playing against you tonight. Young Matson is playing against you tonight. The little Melville girl is playing against you tonight. Every hand is stacked against you. You're yellow and you're rotten. You can't win!”

The fingers of Dutch Flint's right hand closed convulsively on

the long blue-barreled .38 that lay on the table beside him. “Shut up, Chink!” he grated. “Shut up or I'll spill a slug of lead into your mouth!”

“Spill and be damned!” James Lee challenged.

Across the table Ben Carver looked at his watch. “How much longer is this going on?” he asked.

“What time have you got?” James Lee made the inquiry in a bland voice.

“Six-fifty, but time don't mean nothin' to you, does it?”

“It means a lot right now—I'm hungry. Anything to eat around here?”

Bill Putnam frowned. “Dutch, deal the cards!”

“I ain't so nuts about poker like I was. What about some chow? Me and the Chink is both hungry.”

“There's no chow in the joint,” Putnam announced. “Deal the cards. We got to do something for the next half hour or else we'll all go nuts.”

Dutch Flint snarled. “Get up and get something to eat! I'm sick of waiting for that punk with the car.”

CARVER got up. “Wait a minute!” Dutch Flint halted him with a lifted hand. “When you get the sandwiches bring back a good long carving knife.... We don't want to use no guns on this Chink.” Quickly to James Lee, “How about it, Chink? A knife under your ribs suit you just as good as a slug in the heart? Am I right?”

James Lee nodded. “Either way. It makes no difference to me —only I'm sorry to tell you, Dutch, if you let Carver go now he won't come back.”

“What the hell do you mean?”

“What do you suppose I mean? I'm on the spot. I know the way out. I might as well tell you that there isn't a chance in a million that Carver will ever get back if he leaves this joint.”

Half standing, Dutch Flint gave way to a moment's rage. He beat the poker table with both his fists. “Damn your yellow skin! Where do you get that stuff?”

“Take it easy. Sit down! Listen. Dutch, you don't suppose I came here without a mob, do you?”

Once more Dutch Flint reached for the blue .38. “Mob?” he snarled. “What mob?”

“Something less than a million men fore and aft. You don't think that you and I are the only strangers in town tonight, do you? If you've got guts enough to get out of this room, go have a look. Size up the street. Size up the vacant lot back of this joint.”

Dutch Flint, with a puzzled frown on his face, turned to Bill Putnam.

“What do you think about this?” he asked. “What if he ain't lying?”

Putnam looked at the backs of five cards that lay on the table in front of him. Then he looked up at Ben Carver. “Go out and look around,” he said. “We can't take no chances. Size up the street and then prowl around behind this joint. I'll let you in the back door.”

To himself, “If I can get rid of one of them I've got a chance,” James Lee decided.... *“I wonder if Al Blake is on the job?...* I've got to take a chance.” To Carver, “Good luck! If you've got any last words for your surviving relatives, you'd better tell somebody about it.”

Dutch Flint scowled. His glance ranged between Putnam and James Lee. “Can't you make him shut up? If you don't I will!” he said to Putnam.

Carver slid through the door and closed it. Bill Putnam got up and shoved the bolt that barred it.

THERE was a moment of silence. Then, striving with all his intellect to visualize Ben Carver's course and to calculate Al Blake's probable move in the next play, in a voice as steady and

as cold as an arctic mountain, “Deal the cards, Dutch,” James Lee invited. “I'll play you three hands—life or death.”

Dutch Flint sneered. “You lose. You don't need no cards. You lose without any.... What time is it, Bill?”

Putnam looked at his watch. “Seven-twenty.”

“That punk ought to be out in front with the car in ten minutes.”

“Right. Listen, Dutch, you let me get out of here before you finish this Chink. I don't want to stretch for this, and besides that ...”

Interrupting, “You turning yellow? One more gob of gab like that and I spot you with the Chink. I've shot my way out of a mob of better men than you. Sit down!”

Is Al Blake on the job?

“Take it easy, Dutch,” Putnam advised. “I was only trying to play safe.”

“You're safe enough. Nobody's going to hurt you. You can get out of this job on half as good an alibi as the one you used when you croaked that Reno...”

Interrupting the Reno reminiscence, from the darkness of the vacant lot behind the Pastime Club, there sounded the heavy report of a black powder revolver cartridge. The sharper crack of a high-power shell exploding in Al Blake's weapon echoed the first shot.

On the instant that the first shot registered in his consciousness James Lee ducked under the poker table. He heaved against the lower rim of the table with his shoulder. As it went over against Dutch Flint he dived to catch the tumbling gun that had lain at Flint's right hand. He poked the gun upward and fired twice under Dutch Flint's left elbow. As his crumpling victim slumped down on him he swung the long, blue barrel of the heavy .38 dead to a line on Putnam's chest.

He wrestled his way out from under the body of Dutch Flint and got to his feet in time to answer a thunderous summons on

the bolted door of the poker-room. He heard Al Blake's voice. “Open up! How about it, Mr. Lee? You safe?”

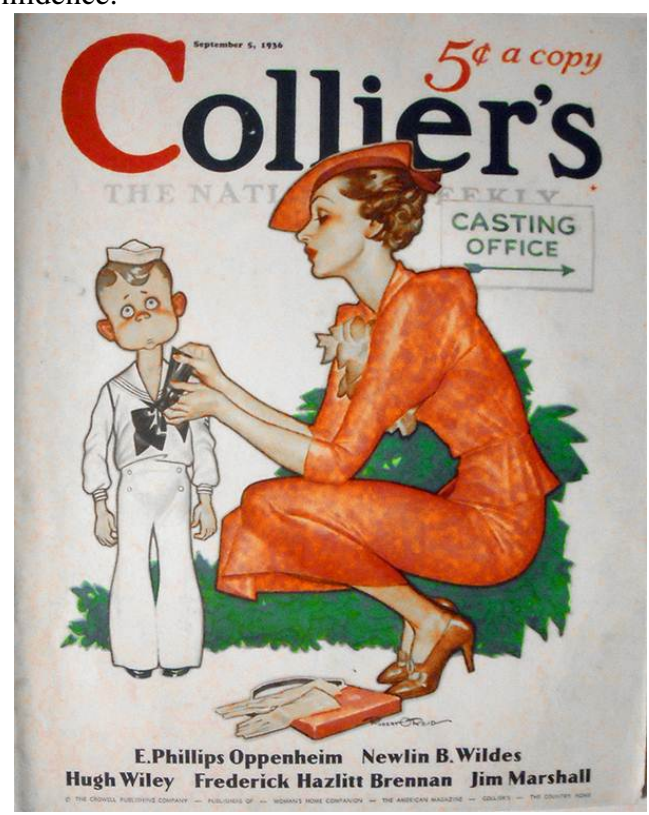
“Safe as a church,” James Lee answered. He slid the bolt on the door and opened it. “How about yourself?”

“Carver burned me through the arm.”

“Where is he?”

“I spiked him. He can stand a life sentence if they patch him up a little.... That's a great gun, Mr. Lee.... Who are these citizens on the floor?... Ah, one of them's Putnam, I see.”

“That's the name. And the other is Dutch Flint,” James Lee said slowly. “He's dead, too.... Go telephone for Sheriff Deane, will you, please? We can let him bungle the remaining formalities with confidence.”



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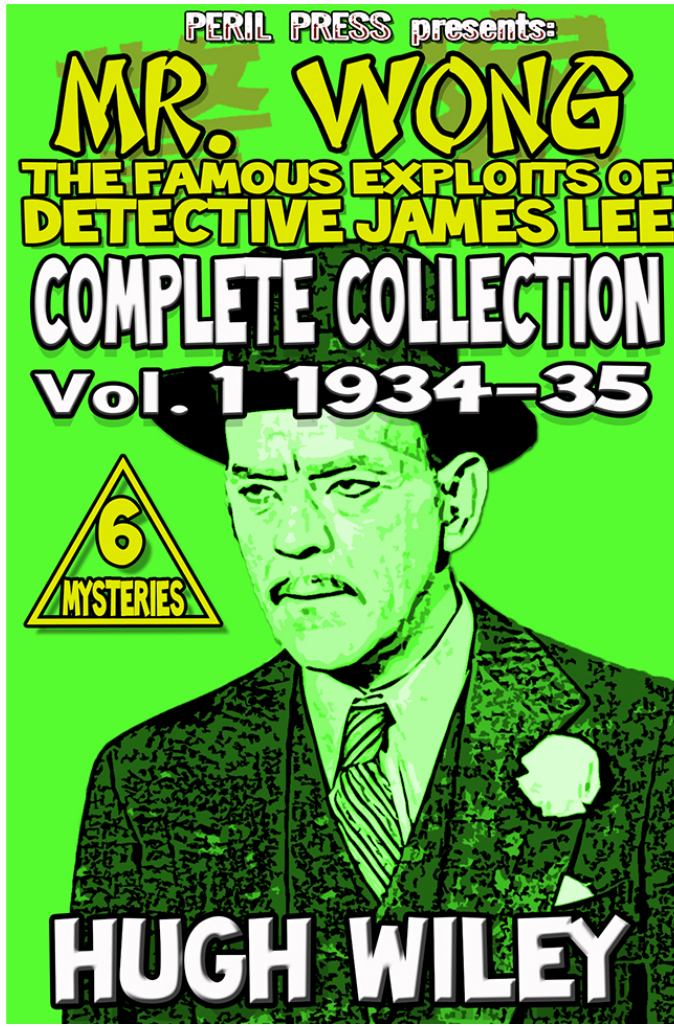

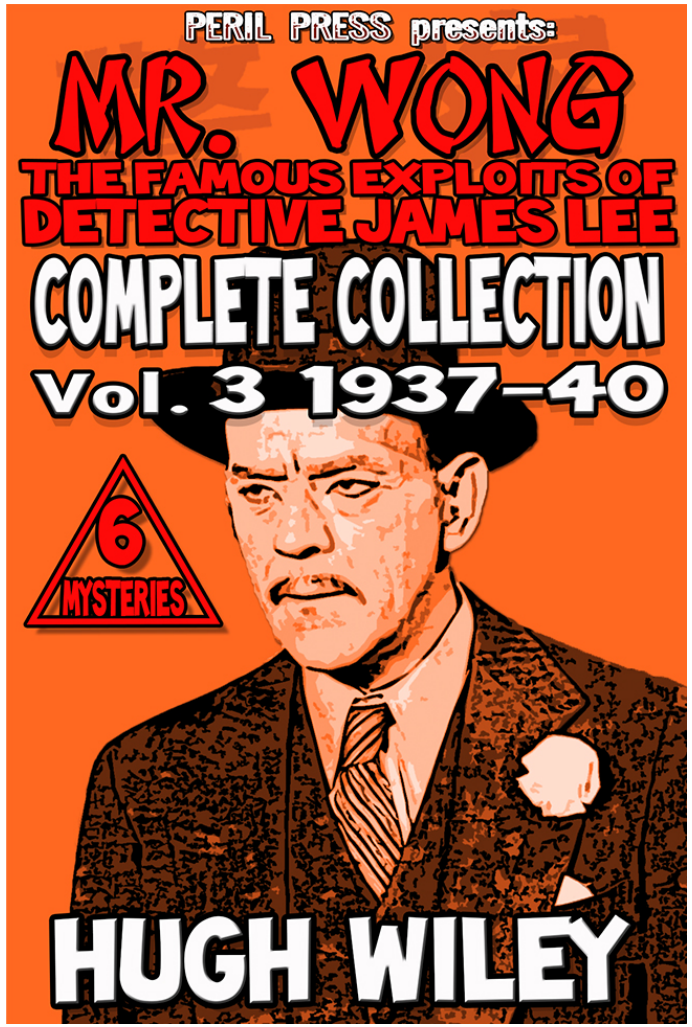
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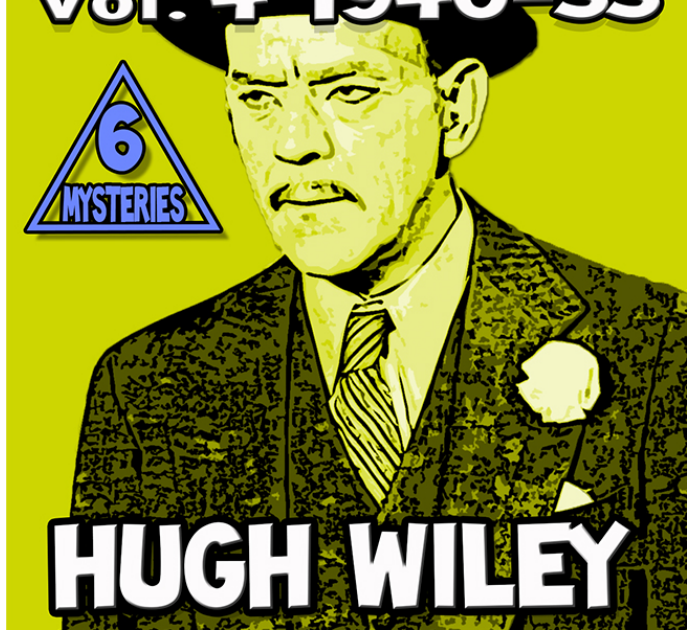

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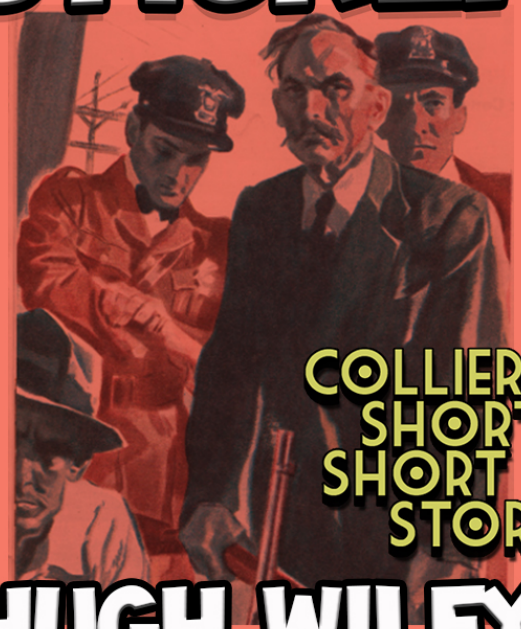

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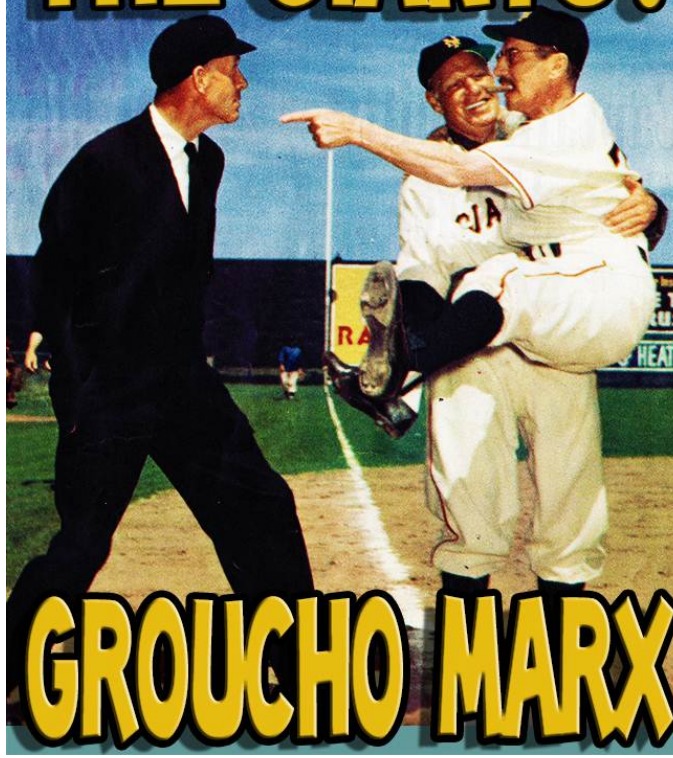
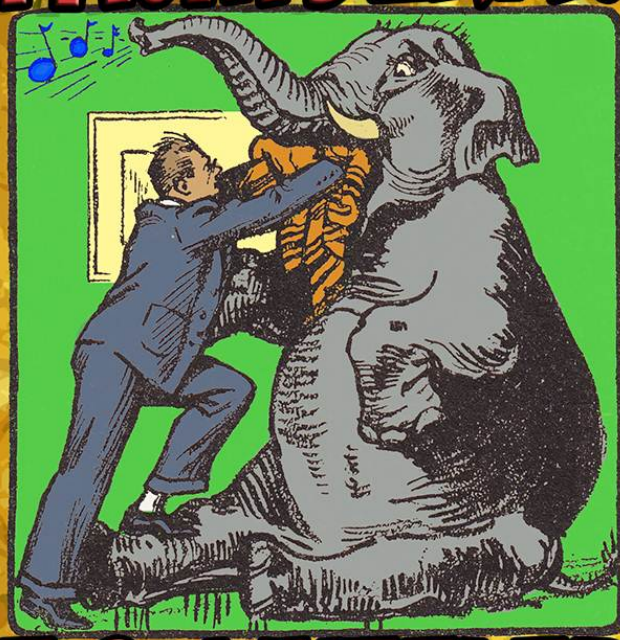


GROUCHO MARX

PERIL PRESS presents:

PACHYDERMO

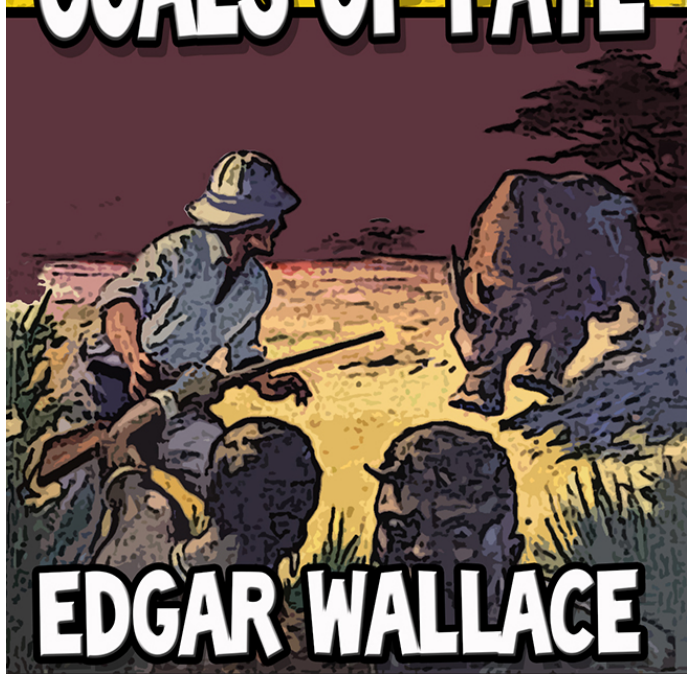


E.G. WHEELER

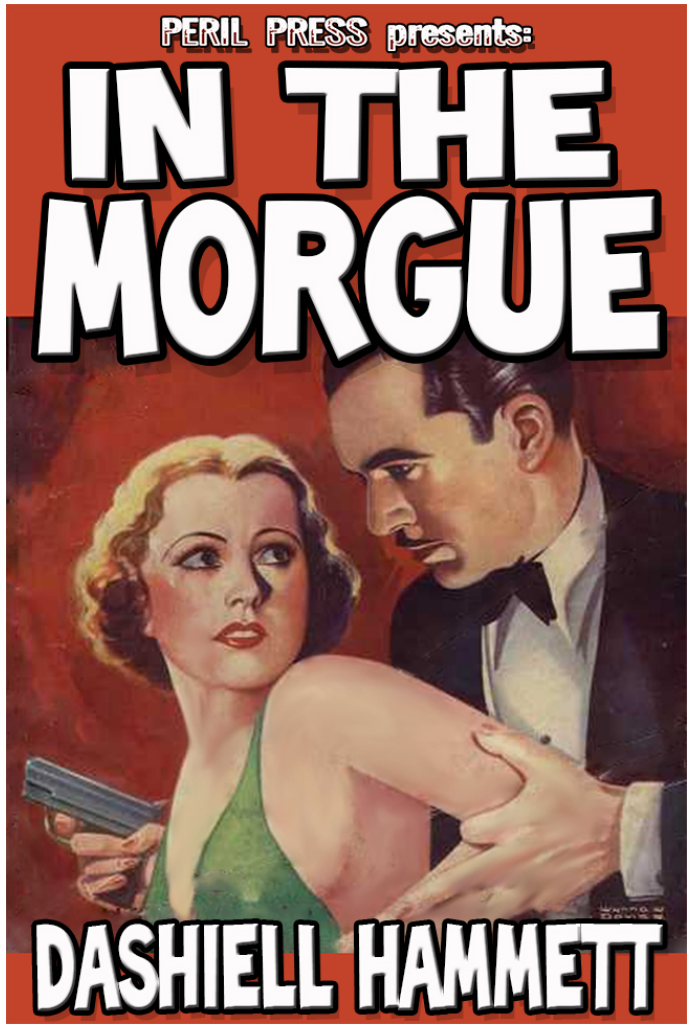
PERIL PRESS presents:

KEEPERS OF THE TREASURE

GOALS OF FATE



EDGAR WALLACE


PERIL PRESS presents:
IN THE MORGUE
DASHIELL HAMMETT

PERIL PRESS presents:
RED DOOM
6 WEIRD MURDER TALES!
DALE CLARK

PERIL PRESS presents:

PHILOSOPHER AND NO MISTAKE

A "BOO BOO BOUNCE" STORY

BEN FRANK

PERIL PRESS presents:

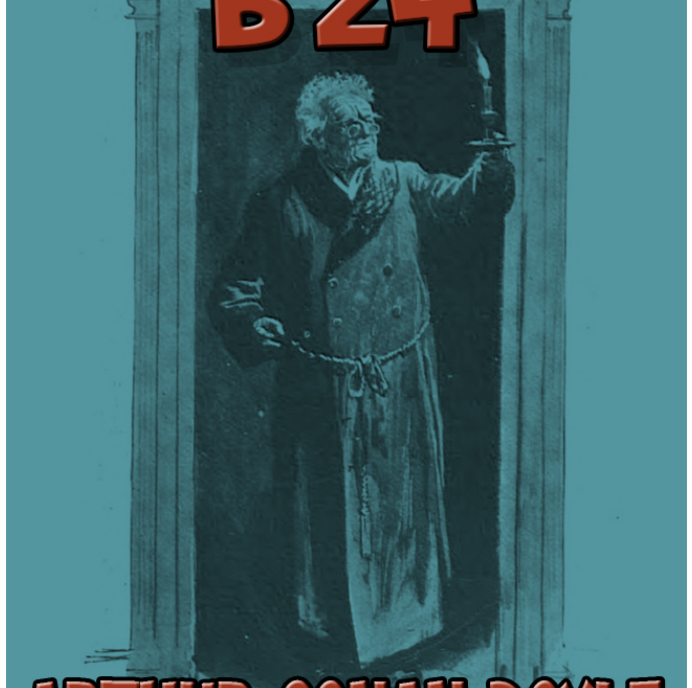
HOCUS-POCUS AND NO MISTAKE

A "BOO BOO BOUNCE" STORY

BEN FRANK

PERIL PRESS presents:

THE STORY OF THE B 24

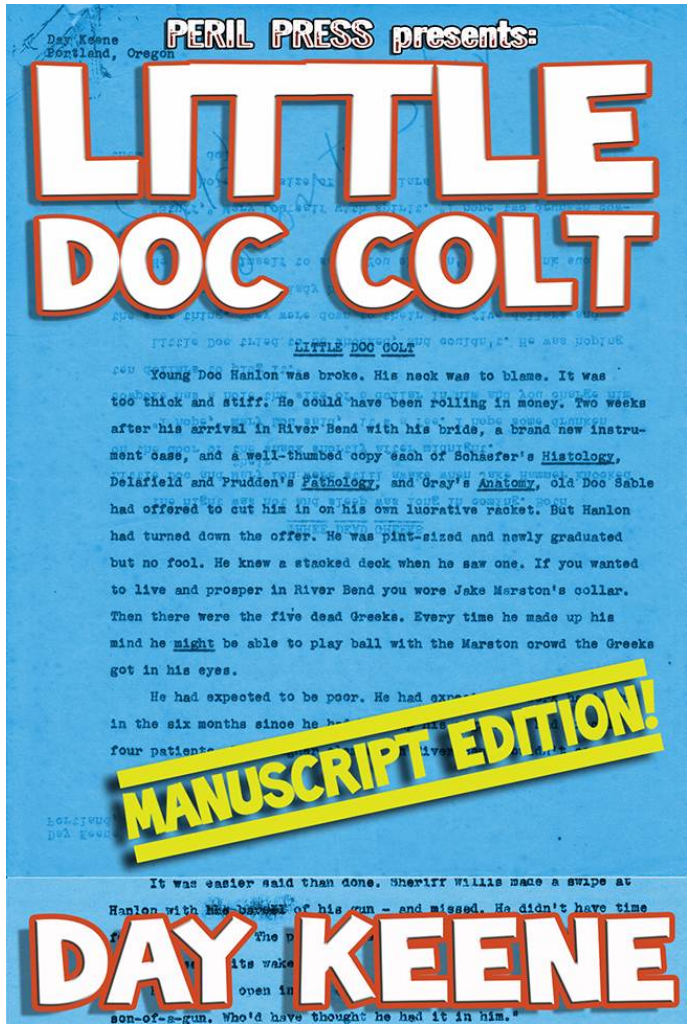


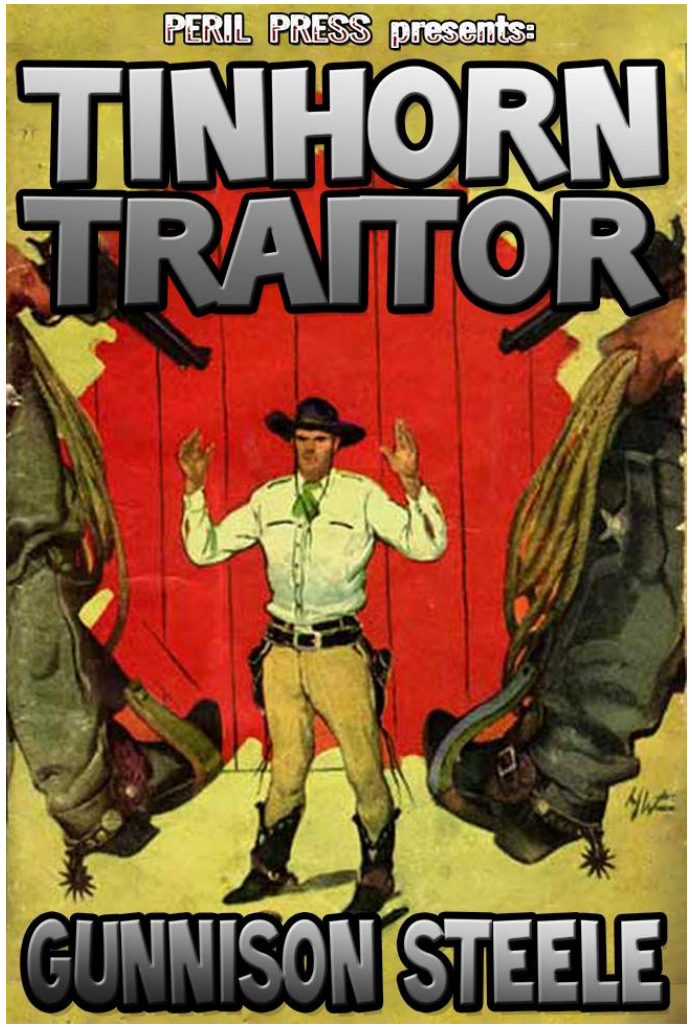
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

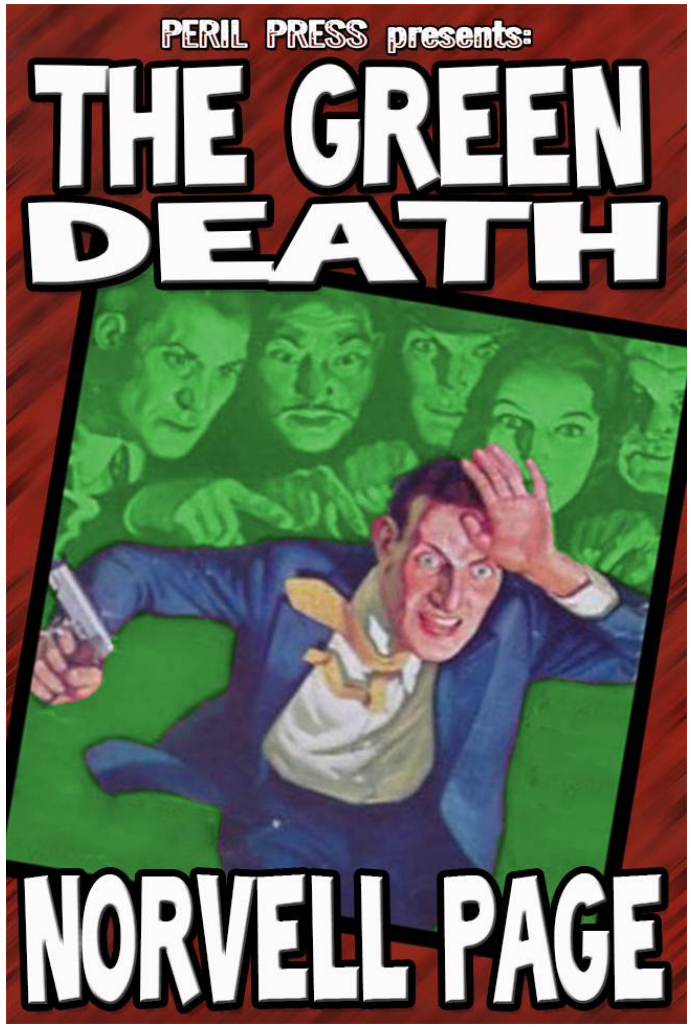
PERIL PRESS presents:

5 PULP TALES OF DOOM

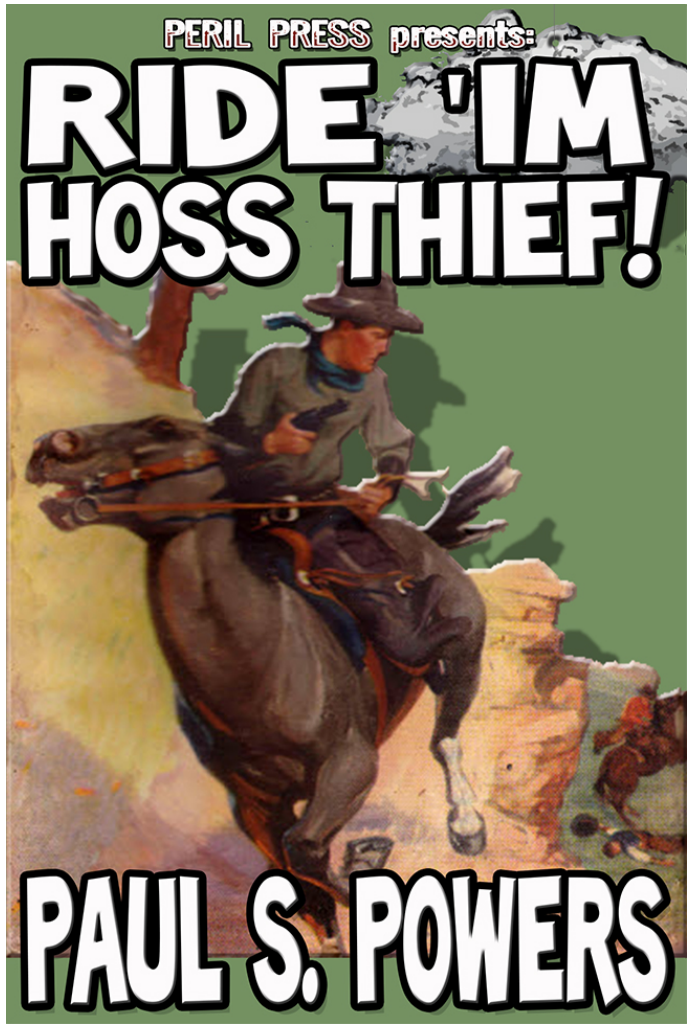
RAY CUMMINGS

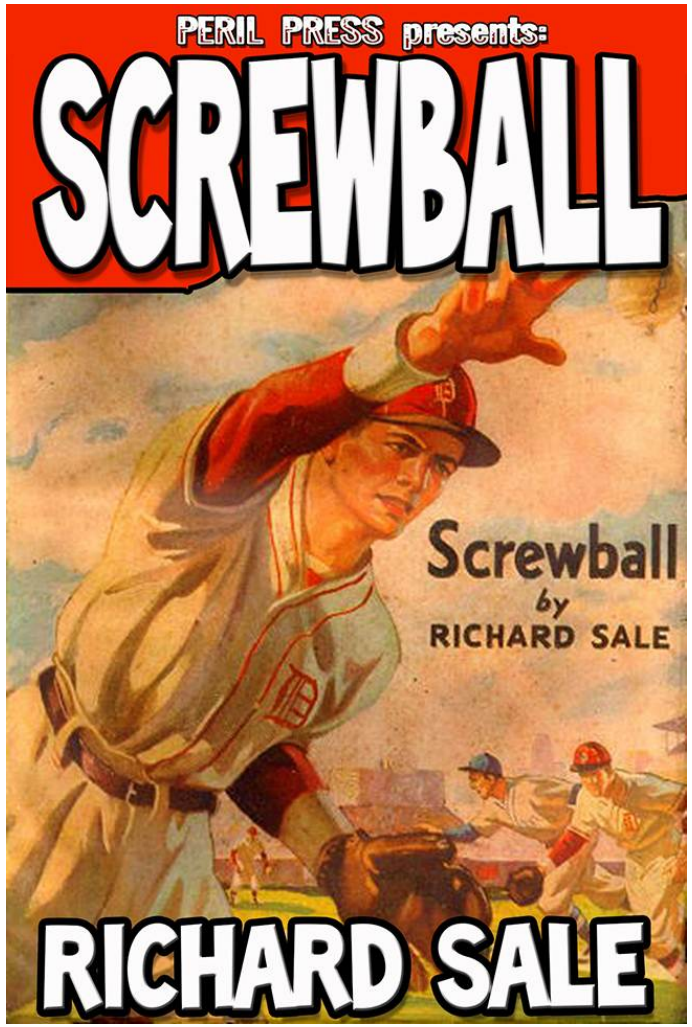

Day Keene
Portland, Oregon
PERIL PRESS presents:
LITTLE DOC COLT
LITTLE DOC COLT
Young Doc Hanlon was broke. His neck was to blame. It was too thick and stiff. He could have been rolling in money. Two weeks after his arrival in River Bend with his bride, a brand new instrument case, and a well-thumbed copy each of Schaefer's Histology, Delafield and Prudden's Pathology, and Gray's Anatomy, old Doc Sable had offered to cut him in on his own lucrative racket. But Hanlon had turned down the offer. He was pint-sized and newly graduated but no fool. He knew a stacked deck when he saw one. If you wanted to live and prosper in River Bend you wore Jake Marston's collar. Then there were the five dead Greeks. Every time he made up his mind he might be able to play ball with the Marston crowd the Greeks got in his eyes.
He had expected to be poor. He had expr
in the six months since he h
four patient
MANUSCRIPT EDITION!
It was easier said than done. Sheriff Willis made a swipe at Hanlon with his barrel of his gun - and missed. He didn't have time f
The p
its wake
open in
son-of-a-gun. Who'd have thought he had it in him."
DAY KEENE

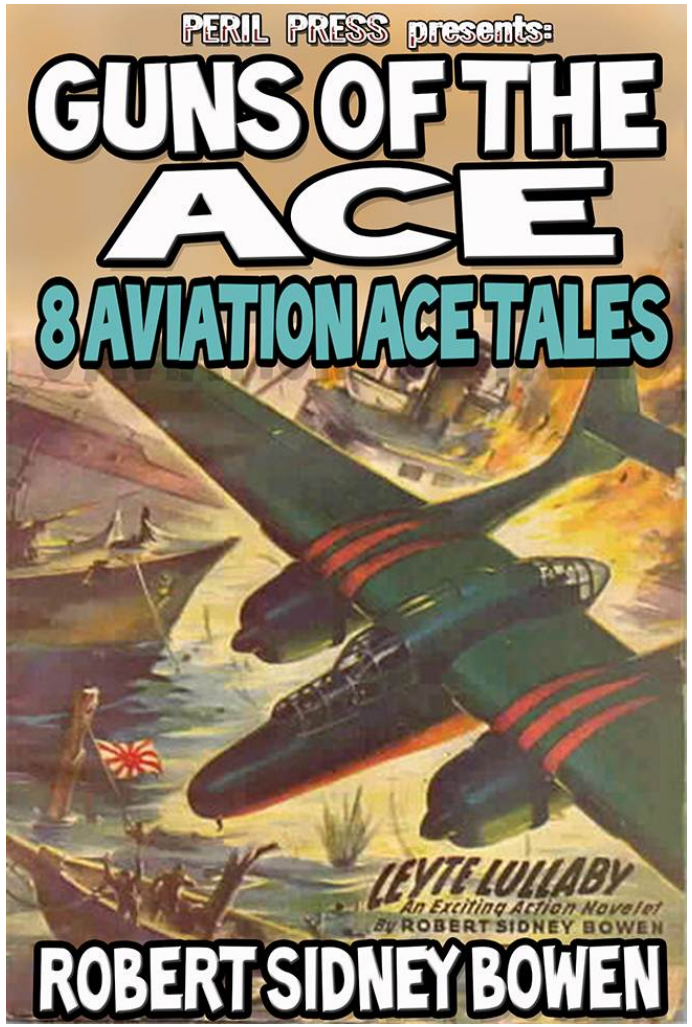

PERIL PRESS presents:
TINHORN TRAITOR
GUNNISON STEELE


PERIL PRESS presents:
THE GREEN DEATH
NORVELL PAGE

PERIL PRESS presents:
THE FRIEND OF CAPTAIN DICK
MURRAY LEINSTER


PERIL PRESS presents:
RIDE 'IM HOSS THIEF!
PAUL S. POWERS

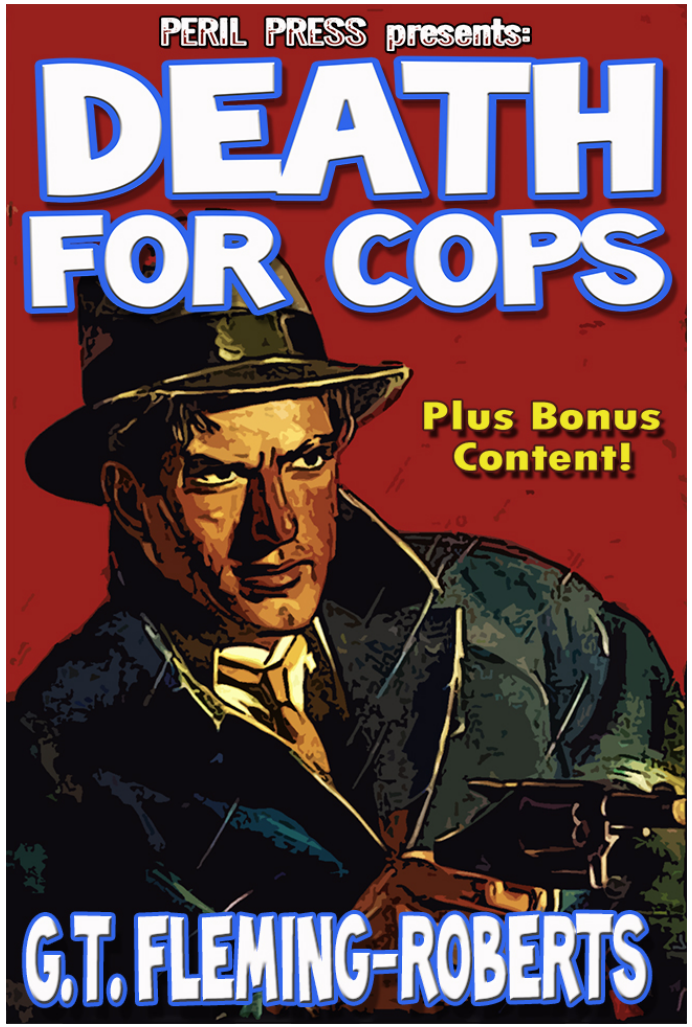

PERIL PRESS presents:
SCREWBALL
Screwball
by
RICHARD SALE
RICHARD SALE

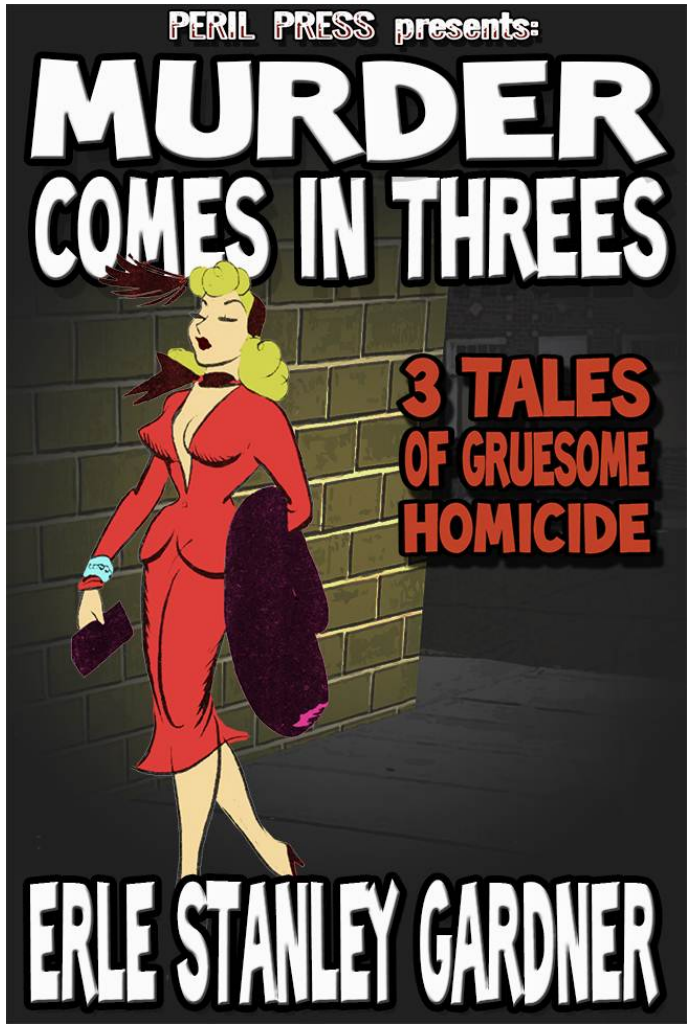

PERIL PRESS presents:
GUNS OF THE ACE
8 AVIATION ACE TALES
LEYTE LULLABY
An Exciting Action Novelet
By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN
ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

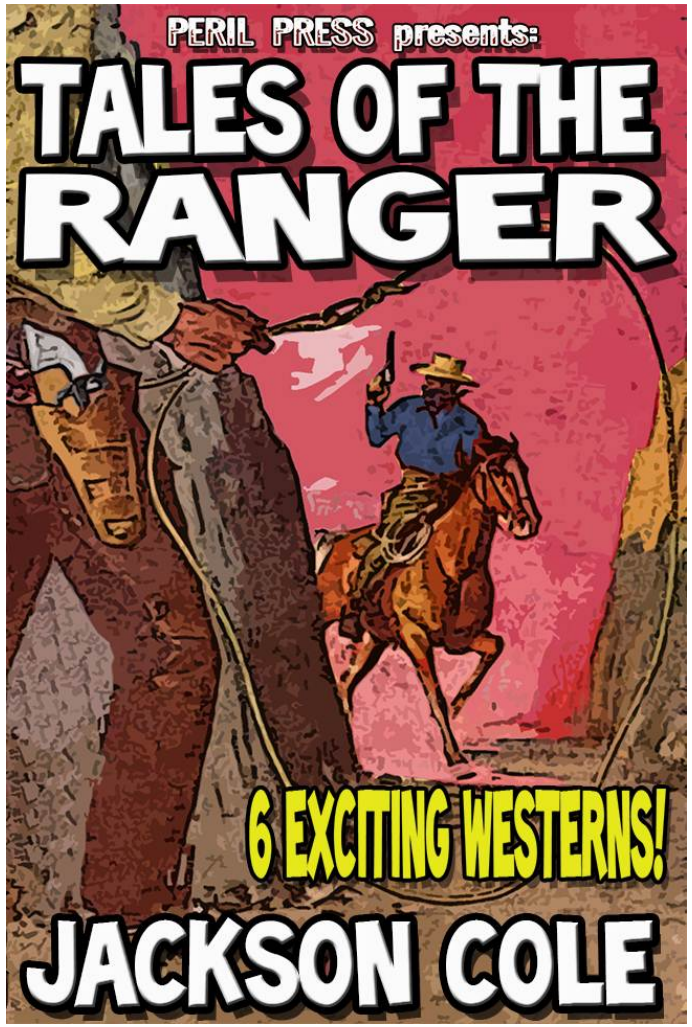
PERIL PRESS presents:

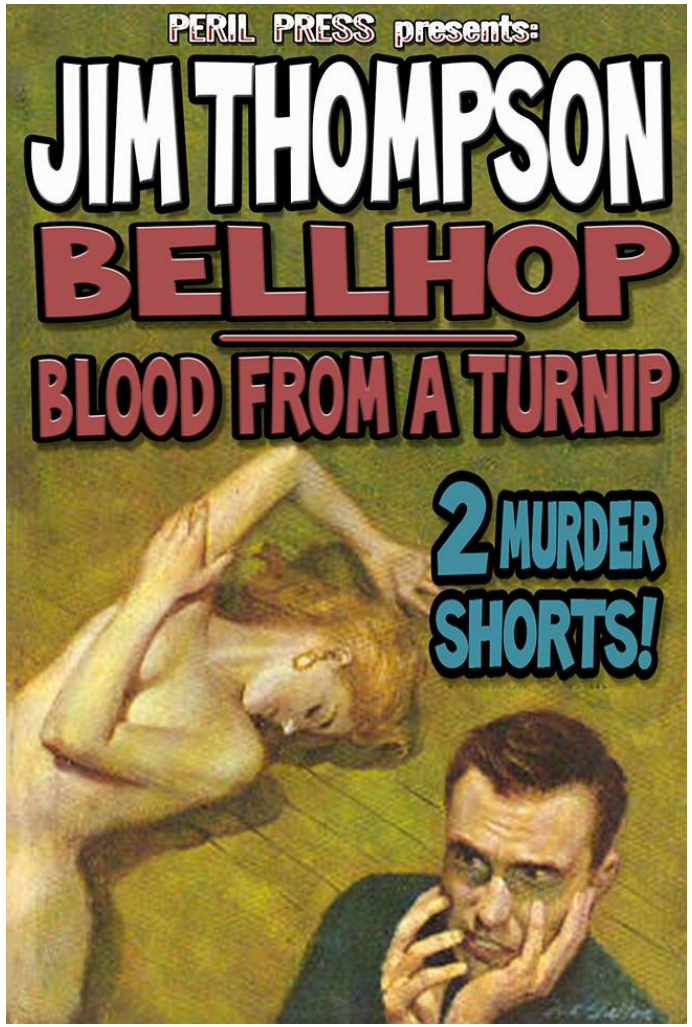
WATSON WAS A WOMAN

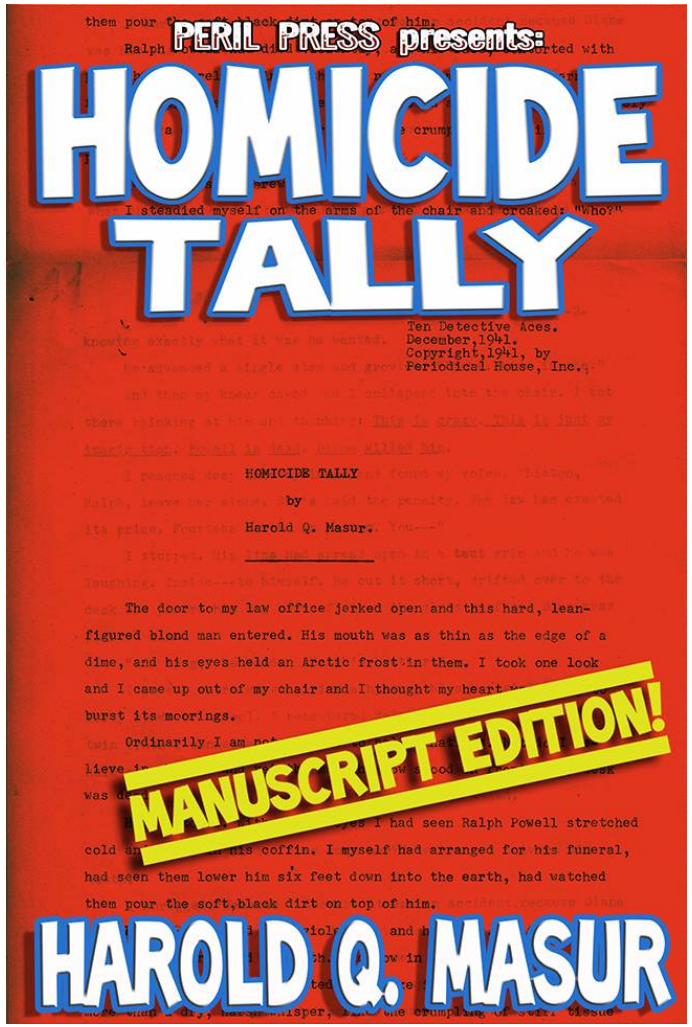
REX STOUT


PERIL PRESS presents:
DEATH FOR COPS
Plus Bonus Content!
G.T. FLEMING-ROBERTS


PERIL PRESS presents:
MURDER
COMES IN THREES
3 TALES
OF GRUESOME
HOMICIDE
ERLE STANLEY GARDNER


PERIL PRESS presents:
TALES OF THE RANGER
6 EXCITING WESTERNS!
JACKSON COLE


PERIL PRESS presents:
JIM THOMPSON
BELLHOP
BLOOD FROM A TURNIP
2 MURDER SHORTS!



I steadied myself on the arms of the chair and croaked: "Who?"

Ten Detective Aces.
December,1941.
Copyright,1941, by
Periodical House, Inc.

HOMICIDE TALLY

by

Harold Q. Masur.

The door to my law office jerked open and this hard, lean-figured blond man entered. His mouth was as thin as the edge of a dime, and his eyes held an Arctic frost in them. I took one look and I came up out of my chair and I thought my heart burst its moorings.

Ordinarily I am

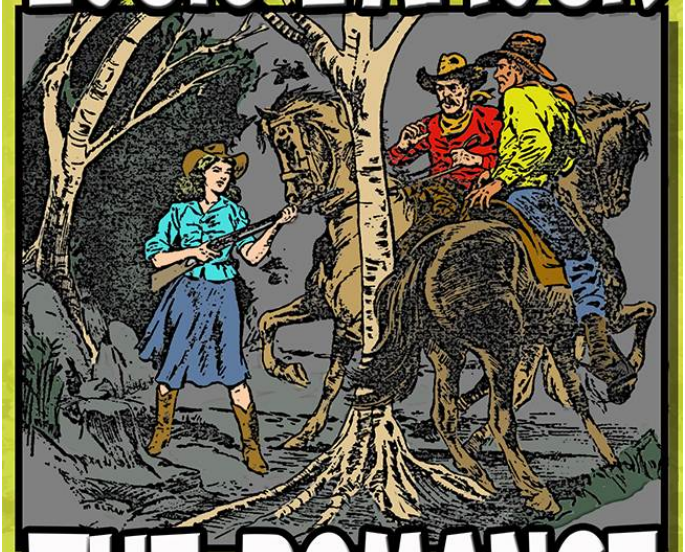
was

cold

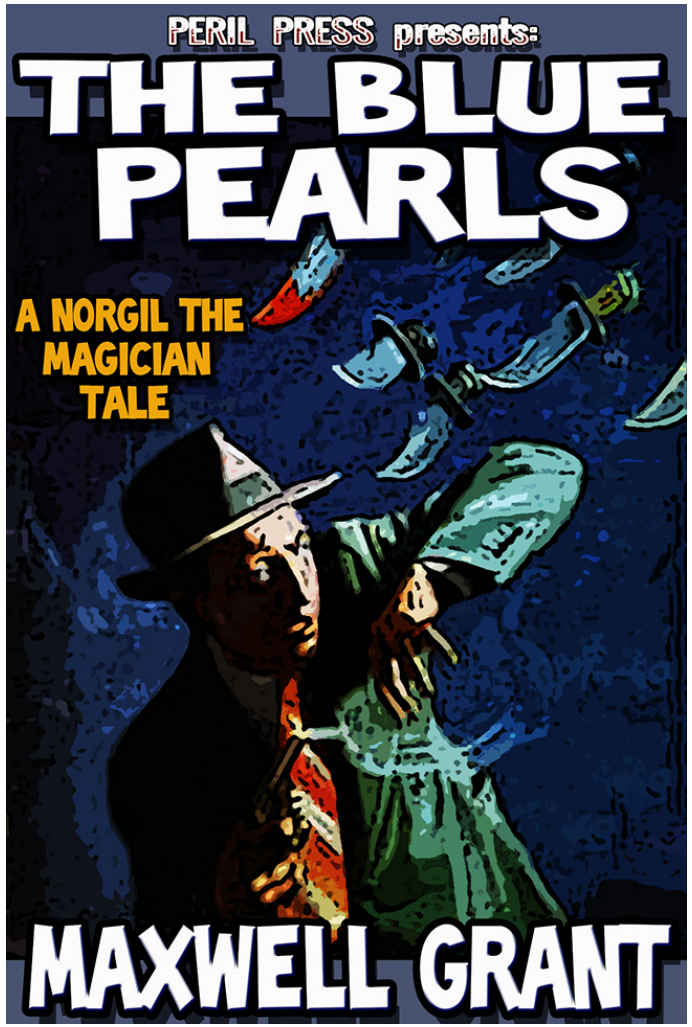
had seen them lower him six feet down into the earth, had watched them pour the soft, black dirt on top of him.

PERIL PRESS presents:

LOUIS L'AMOUR



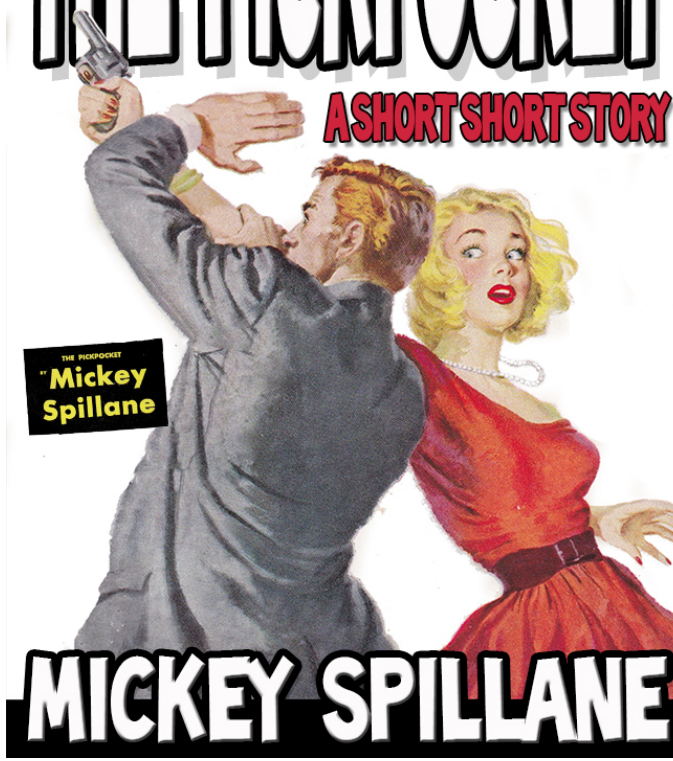
THE ROMANCE OF PIUTE BILL


PERIL PRESS presents:
THE BLUE PEARLS
A NORGIL THE MAGICIAN TALE
MAXWELL GRANT

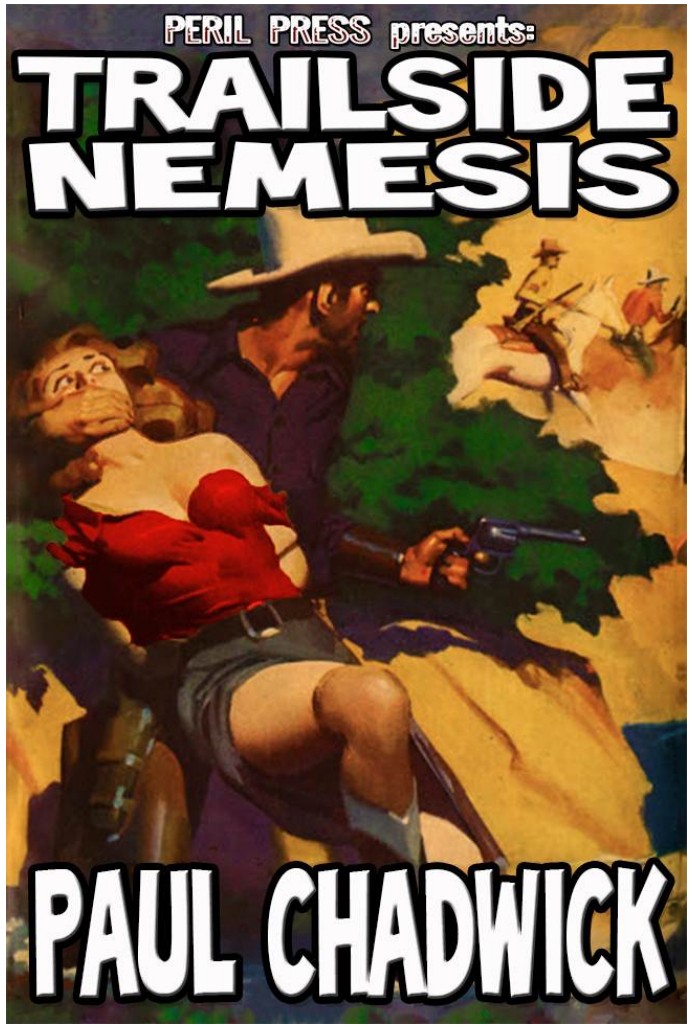
PERIL PRESS presents:

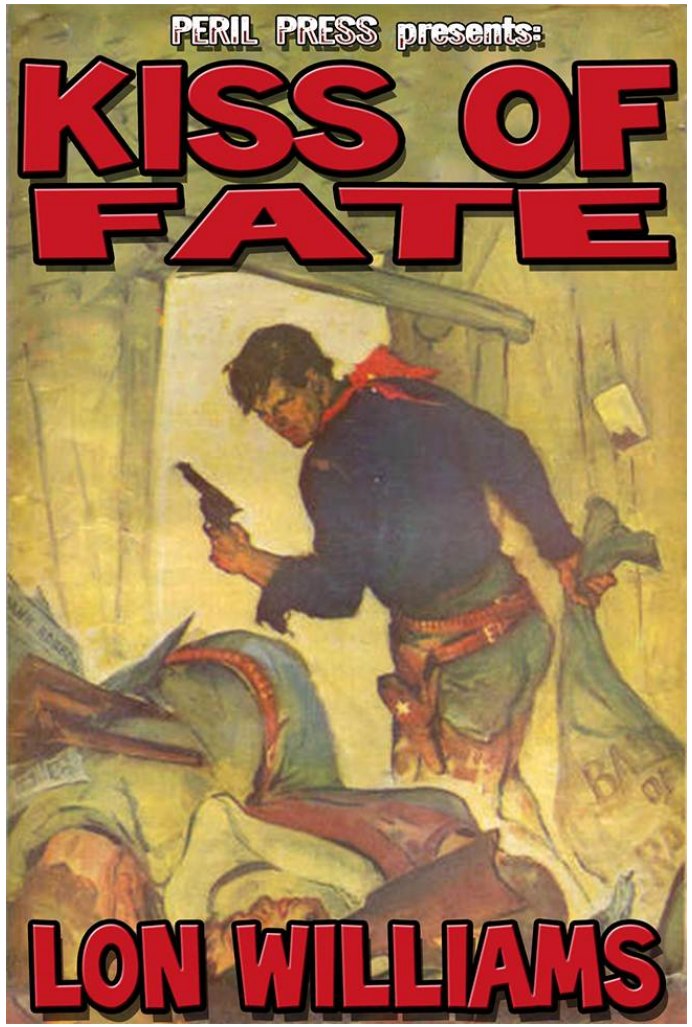
THE PICKPOCKET

A SHORT SHORT STORY



MICKEY SPILLANE


PERIL PRESS presents:
TRAILSIDE NEMESIS
PAUL CHADWICK


PERIL PRESS presents:
KISS OF FATE
LON WILLIAMS

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